



AFTER ACTION REPORT

**Analysis of County of Simcoe Emergency Exercise
“Operation Plugged In”
October 6, 2011**

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Report Prepared By:

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Background

On Thursday October 6, 2011 a major tabletop exercise sponsored by the County of Simcoe took place at the Nottawasaga Inn entitled, "Operation Plugged In". This exercise simulated a winter ice storm which resulted in an extended power outage lasting three weeks. This exercise included 168 participants representing both public and private organizations. Participants were divided into 19 tables, representing 12 different sectors to ensure that discussions on relevant sector related topics took place.

The sectors included:

- The County of Simcoe
- Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit
- Medical
- Community Health
- Paramedic Services & Fire
- Municipalities
- Emergency Social Services
- Academics, Tourism & Agriculture
- Industry & Utilities
- Communications
- Courts, Custody & DND
- Compassionate Care

The goal of "Operation Plugged In" was to collaborate through an effective public and private sector training partnership to strengthen our community disaster resilience in the areas of preparedness, response and recovery. To achieve this goal the exercise was divided into three modules: preparedness, response and recovery, each module had four objectives:

1. Promote a common business continuity planning template and lexicon.
2. Promote a common Incident Management System; consider media relations, intra-agency & inter-agency communications.
3. Clarify the roles and responsibilities of each agency and identify how we come together as a whole during times of emergency.
4. Identify gaps and vulnerabilities in existing plans.

The objectives were based on four themes that were identified by the design team as important factors for discussion. These themes were: business continuity planning, command and control structure, roles and responsibilities and finally testing existing plans. The modules allowed for group discussions followed by questions to ensure each theme was considered.

Exercise Development

"Operation Plugged In" was developed by a Design Team which consisted of Cathy Clark (County of Simcoe, Emergency Management), Randy Smith (Fire Chief, Town of Innisfil), Shernette Clarke and Kelley Magnusson (Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit). The design team generated the material used during the exercise and outlined the content of each module. To supplement the design team's efforts an advisory team was formed. The advisory team consisted of individuals with varying expertise in emergency management. The following

individuals were a part of the advisory team and contributed significantly to the development and success of the exercise. Mike Bendell (Stevenson Memorial Hospital), James Besley (County of Simcoe Paramedic Services), Doriano Calvano and Carol-Ann Harkness (County of Simcoe Emergency Social Services), Lisa Garratt (County of Simcoe Long-Term Care), Allan Greenwood (County of Simcoe Corporate Communications), Captain Robert Hay (CFB Borden), Brenda MacPherson (North Simcoe Muskoka Community Care Access Centre), Rebecca Orton (Georgian Bay General Hospital), Inspector John Trude (Ontario Provincial Police Collingwood Detachment) and Kerry Woodward (Canadian Red Cross Simcoe Muskoka Branch).

The Advisory and Design Teams met on October 7, 2011 to discuss the outcomes of the previous day's exercise and discussed possible questions for the electronic survey that was going to be distributed to the participants. On October 14, 2011 the design team met to review the survey results and determine the appropriate recommendations that became evident from the exercise.

Survey Results

An online survey was distributed to all participants shortly after "Operation Plugged In". The questions were used to indicate how valuable the day was to the participants as well as whether the information gained would be utilized in their organization. A total of 75 participants responded to the survey with only one stating that the day was not valuable to their emergency preparedness program. An overwhelming majority indicated that the exercise helped them to identify areas of opportunity for the growth of their emergency management program.

Recommendations

1. Promote emergency preparedness for staff and individual organizations in the following areas:
 - Personal preparedness
 - Business continuity planning
 - Include: emergency vendor agreements (e.g. fuel, critical supplies, alternate methods of payment i.e.. cash, paper point of sales)
 - Crisis communications planning
2. Expand the membership of the Simcoe Emergency Response Committee (SERC) to include representatives of agencies who participated in "Operation Plugged In" to:
 - Foster relationship building and coordinate between planning groups
 - Increase understanding of "who does what?" and the broader community risks
3. Continued development of a Regional Recovery Strategy to be led by the County of Simcoe, including:
 - Recovery plans for individual organizations
 - Psychological health as primary consideration: critical incident stress management, cohort forums, compassion fatigue and decision fatigue
 - Process for acknowledgement of staff and volunteer efforts regarding response and recovery

Exercise Resources and Documents

All documents distributed during "Operation Plugged In" as well as the module videos are available on the County of Simcoe website. A summary video of the exercise events is also available and can be found at <http://www.simcoe.ca/dpt/em/program/index.htm>.

Participant Comments

- "The day was extremely well planned and valuable. The opportunity to exchange ideas and learn from other organizations is important, and I found the entire exercise and day very energizing." - Marie McCallum, Barrie Victim Crisis Assistance and Referral Services
- "I personally found today's presentation an excellent experience. It was a great chance to network and understand emergency management from a wider lens." - Craig Williams, Deputy Fire Chief, Springwater Township
- "I had a fantastic day yesterday and it was a great opportunity for St. John Ambulance to learn. I found that all of the NGOs share similar concerns and we are all on very similar pages in the terms of disaster response." - Tait Mitchell, St. John Ambulance

Photos



The launch of "Operation Plugged In", L-R: Randy Smith (Innisfil), Cathy Clark (County of Simcoe), Deputy Warden Harry Hughes (County of Simcoe), Jane Sinclair (County of Simcoe), Dr. Charles Gardner (Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit)

Approximately 168 participants of "Operation Plugged In" represented a broad sector of public and private sector partners.

