

“Designing Exercises for EMCOMM”

Regular participation by individuals within your EMCOMM group, is the best method of measuring how ready your group is to support your Served Agencies. Unlike what most people say about riding a bicycle (you never forget?), communication skills and technical skills in support of the communications effort, require some occasional practice. Practice can become boring if the same exercise is used time and again. Therefore, we need to design new exercises to keep as much "fun" in the exercise as possible. Let's face it, if our people enjoy an exercise they are much more likely to "make" time for the next exercise.

A few items, seven I will touch on this evening, that are under our control, can make designing exercises more fun and effective. They are:

1. Set specific goals for the exercise.

This is easy. Some of the more frequently used goals are:

- a. To introduction of new procedures
- b. To stress a particular skill or process. Such as Packet, voice operations, APRS, ATV, etc.
- c. To re-test a weakness discovered in previous exercise(s)
- d. To test "end-to-end" of your operation (from "blind" callout, to assembly at staging areas, to setup on scene, to operation, to tear-down, to Debriefing).

2. Vary the skills being tested.

This is also easy. It usually includes one of the following:

- a. To Test Net operation skills
- b. To Test Net interruptions and relocation skills
- c. To Test Digital skills
- d. To Test Message handling skills

3. Regularly test each aspect of your operation.

It is far too easy to emphasize one or two of the more glamorous aspects of your unit. Make sure that over time, that you exercise every skill required to support the needs of your served agencies.

4. Articulate the purpose or goal of the exercise.

People respond well to timely information. If they understand the purpose of each exercise it is far easier for them to maintain focus on what the exercise is for and thus will provide more accurate information on where additional training is needed to meet the goals of the exercise.

5. Solicit and use feed-back on the exercise.

Each person likes to think that their opinion and input will be listened to and used, and indeed it should be. If you consistently ask for their input, you are much more likely to get good information. The better the information, the better the results, and the better trained your group will be.

6. Choose the type of exercise

There are three types of exercise used by most EMCOMM groups. Which of these will work best for you is a function of the goals you have for this specific exercise.

a. Full Scale:

A prime example of a full scale exercise is the S.E.T. Of necessity you are looking to test every aspect of your preparedness. These exercises are very complex, prone to failure of some type (that's where you want the failures - in exercises), and will yield the best information about if and where you need to focus your training.

b. Tabletop:

Tabletop exercises are especially valuable for introducing new procedures or techniques in a classroom setting. Their primary limitation is that fewer participants can be involved. Tabletop exercises are essentially role-playing meetings with one person acting as moderator and others representing various locations or functions to review their response to the situation.

The main luxury of tabletop exercises is that you can interrupt the exercise to discuss any aspect of the drill.

c. Functional:

Functional exercises utilize the same facilities as the full scale drill but have the latitude of having some of the people perform their duties from home. It also provides much the same latitude the Tabletop exercise does in that the drill may be suspended for discussion of anything needed.

7. Let the scenario evolve

EVERY scenario must have three elements.

1. Starting point
2. One or more tests
3. Ending point

Summary:

Think through your simulation in detail but do not lose sight of the exercise goal. Before adding any element to your exercise, ask yourself the question "Where/how does this element fit the goals?" If it does not fit then either do not use this element or modify the goals. Nothing is "cast in concrete" until the exercise is finished.