

What is a tabletop exercise?

Introduction: The tabletop exercise is a meeting to discuss a simulated emergency situation. Members of the organization review and discuss the actions that would take place in a particular event, testing their emergency plan in an informal, low-stress environment. Tabletop exercises are used to clarify roles and responsibilities and to identify additional mitigation and preparedness needs. The exercise should result in action plans for continued improvement of the emergency plan.

Participant Expectations:

- Be willing to engage in the conversation
- Challenge yourself and others in a cordial manner
- It is OK to not have an answer
- Accept scenario and work within parameters

Facilitator Expectations:

- Control pace and flow of exercise
- Stimulate discussion; draw out answers and solutions from the group

Evaluator Expectations:

- Identify strengths and areas of improvement
- Assist in the development of the After Action Report (AAR)

Observer Expectations:

- Participate in discussion when asked

Definition: A tabletop exercise is an activity in which key personnel that are assigned emergency management roles and responsibilities are gathered to discuss, in a non-threatening environment, various simulated emergency situations.

Major Elements:

- Policy level personnel evaluate plans and procedures
- Resolution of coordination and responsibility questions
- Facilitated group discussion

Advantages:

- Low stress environment
- Low cost
- Ongoing evaluation
- Facilitated group discussion of problem areas

Disadvantages:

- Lacks realism
- Not a true test of operational capability
- Provides only a superficial review of an organizations overall plan

