

Lab Sciences Fire TTX AAR-IP

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Lab Sciences Fire TTX

After-Action Report/Improvement Plan

December 2, 2024

This After-Action Report/Improvement Plan (AAR/IP) aligns exercise objectives with preparedness doctrine and related frameworks and guidance. This AAR meets Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Program (HSEEP) guidelines. Exercise information required for preparedness reporting and trend analysis is included.

Exercise Overview

Exercise Name	Lab Sciences Fire TTX
Exercise Date	July 17, 2024
Planning Date	N/A
Hotwash Date	July 17, 2024
Scope	This exercise is a tabletop, designed to evaluate internal response capabilities only. Exercise play is limited to general administrative incident management, although certain on-scene incident management strategies were evaluated.
Focus Areas ^[1]	Response, Recovery
Capabilities ^[2]	§ Planning § Operational Coordination § Fatality Management § Environmental Response § Situational Assessment

Exercise Name	Lab Sciences Fire TTX
Objectives	§ Feel comfortable with incident management processes and structure; § Understand how to apply incident management processes and plans to a scenario; § Consider how similar events might impact standard daily operations; § Identify capabilities, target capabilities, and gaps.
Hazard	Uncontained Fire, Hazardous Materials Release
Scenario	A fire alarm reported in the Lab Sciences building, compounded by following injects of a working structure fire, hazardous materials release, and likely mass casualty incident.
Sponsor	Arkansas State University
Participating Organizations	Office of Emergency Management (Wyatt Reed, Facilitator & Ronnie Gilley), Disaster Preparedness & Emergency Management Program (Jon Carvell, Evaluator), Environmental Health & Safety (Melissa Dooley), Facilities Management (Brian Lasey & Petree Buford), Risk Management (Sandra Bramblett), Student Affairs (Dr. Martha Spack), University Communications (Todd Clark), University Police Department (Randy Martin & Billy Branch)
Point of Contact	Wyatt Reed , Emergency Operations and Occupational Safety Specialist Office of Emergency Management Arkansas State University WReed@AState.edu or (870) 972-3352

Analysis of Capabilities

Table 1 includes the exercise objectives, aligned capabilities, and performance ratings for each capability as observed during the exercise and determined by the evaluation team.

Objective	Capability [3]	Performed without Challenges (P)	Performed with Some Challenges (S)	Performed with Major Challenges (M)	Unable to be Performed (U)
Feel comfortable with incident management processes and structure	Planning	X			
	Operational Coordination	X			
	Situational Assessment	X			

Objective	Capability [3]	Performed without Challenges (P)	Performed with Some Challenges (S)	Performed with Major Challenges (M)	Unable to be Performed (U)
Understand how to apply incident management processes and plans to a scenario	Planning	X			
	Operational Coordination	X			
	Situational Assessment	X			
Consider how similar events might impact standard daily operations	Planning	X			
	Environmental Response	X			
Identify capabilities, target capabilities, and gaps	Planning	X			
	Fatality Management	X			

Table 1. Summary of Core Capability Performance

Rating Definitions:

Performed without Challenges (P): The targets and critical tasks associated with the capability were completed in a manner that achieved the objective(s) and did not negatively impact the performance of other activities. The performance of this activity did not contribute to additional health and/or safety risks for the public or for emergency workers, and it was conducted in accordance with applicable plans, policies, procedures, regulations, and laws.

Performed with Some Challenges (S): The targets and critical tasks associated with the capability were completed in a manner that achieved the objective(s) and did not negatively impact the performance of other activities. The performance of this activity did not contribute to additional health and/or safety risks for the public or for emergency workers, and it was conducted in accordance with applicable plans, policies, procedures, regulations, and laws. However, opportunities to enhance effectiveness and/or efficiency were identified.

Performed with Major Challenges (M): The targets and critical tasks associated with the capability were completed in a manner that achieved the objective(s), but some or all of the following were observed: demonstrated performance had a negative impact on the performance of other activities; contributed to additional health and/or safety risks for the public or for emergency workers; and/or was not conducted in accordance with applicable plans, policies, procedures,

regulations, and laws.

Unable to be Performed (U): The targets and critical tasks associated with the capability were not performed in a manner that achieved the objective(s).

The following sections provide an overview of the performance related to each exercise objective and associated capability, highlighting strengths and areas for improvement.

Capability Definitions:

Planning: Conduct a systematic process engaging the whole community as appropriate in the development of executable strategic, operational, and/or tactical-level approaches to meet defined objectives.

Operational Coordination: Establish and maintain a unified and coordinated operational structure and process that appropriately integrates all critical stakeholders and supports the execution of core capabilities.

Fatality Management: Provide fatality management services, including decedent remains recovery and victim identification, working with local authorities to provide temporary storage and sharing information with mass care services for the purpose of reunifying family members and caregivers with missing persons/remains, and providing counseling to the bereaved.

Environmental Response: Conduct appropriate measures to ensure the protection of the health and safety of the public and workers, as well as the environment, from all-hazards in support of responder operations and the affected communities.

Situational Assessment: Provide all decision-makers with decision-relevant information regarding the nature and extent of the hazard, any cascading effects, and the status of the response.

Evaluator Notes

Initial Scenario

Initial evacuations and alarm confirmations are likely to go smoother in the busier hours of the day than less busy. Reports of fire and/or a fire alarm may go to various places, such as the University Police's dispatch center, administrative staff, the Facilities Management Work Order Center, etc. It is important to not only direct people to notify University Police, but also to anticipate these other entities that may receive reports and direct them to notify University Police as well.

To mitigate initial impacts, proper response protocols (including evacuation procedures) must be accessible both before and during the incident. This may include tools from marketing campaigns to signage.

Inject 1

Short of physically being present, confirming a fire can be difficult. Cameras may be used, but in this particular building, the infrastructure is likely not present for real-time confirmation. Discussed ways to add credibility to threat, including volume/specificity of reports.

Inject 2

Appropriate campus stakeholders such as Environmental Health and Safety did well to identify initial areas of concern. Additional access to these databases likely needs to be expanded, including CampusOptics' Hazardous Materials portal. After confirmation of the threat, UPD appropriately highlighted the importance of triggering the campus emergency notification system as well as notifying the chain of command. Adding cameras to buildings for real-time confirmation of threats and hazards in addition to general surveillance would be beneficial.

Inject 3

Highlighted the question of integrating Jonesboro E911 into aiding campus dispatch. Likely, E911 will already be getting numerous calls since cellular 911 calls from campus are routed to their center. Consider who should be notified and at what level: this could include building-level staff, such as safety committees. Emergency Operations Center needs to be prepared for activation as well as the campus incident management team. The university likely needs to evaluate readiness for promptly establishing an EOC and activating a campus IMT. At this stage, prompt public information activities should be started.

Inject 4

Constant evaluation of stakeholders and incident objectives needs to occur as the scene unfolds. Consider rescheduling classes or canceling – a discussed advantage of canceling would be

prompting a voluntary evacuation, much in the way that inclement weather closures prompt this, without having to publicize it as such. Notifying area hospitals and the Craighead County Office of Emergency Management is necessary to ensure operational coordination remains in place and a common operating picture exists. Utilize MoU with St. Bernard's for counseling services and evaluate if this capability meets target capabilities. Fill gaps with campus resources and potentially outside consultants. Start the recovery process with the insurance company through the Office of Risk Management to preserve scene integrity. Evaluate plans to move communications from UPD to the Division of Communications, as well as a devolution plan in accordance with notification policies.

Inject 5

Fatality management may present challenges due to the infrequency of handling this on campus. However, in general, follow Student Affairs protocols for a death on campus. University Police can assist in notifications to next-of-kin. Mortuary assistance can be utilized through ADEM but is likely not needed for a localized incident such as this. The Chancellor and President should be made aware of fatalities. An identified challenge is the delay in reporting fatalities until a NOK and university officials are notified. Work with media to release information but respect the privacy and integrity of the investigation.

Final Inject

The recovery process starts quickly. Not only does this building contain space, but it likely has unique assets such as chemicals and experiments that cannot be quickly replaced. Ensure the focus is not just on immediate response and the tragedy itself but also on recovery and business continuity. Players properly identified the importance of involving structural engineers, insurance adjusters, and worker's compensation providers for employees injured.

Facilitator Notes

Overall Evaluation

The exercise overall was a success in the eyes of the facilitator. Players did an exceptional job in allowing appropriate stakeholders to be responsible for answering questions within their subject matter expertise. Additional stakeholder buy-in would have likely offered additional perspectives from key decision-makers that would have guided the conversation along. The Office of Emergency Management can improve upon future exercises by continuing to expand the stakeholders involved as players. An area that needs additional evaluation in the future is the ability to quickly activate an Incident Management Team (IMT) and Emergency Operations Center (EOC). Additionally, meetings with policymakers would likely help set the vision for incident response and management. This is necessary to define who is responsible for certain aspects of the response, as well as ensuring internal agencies are aware of these policies and abiding by them.

To end on a positive note, all players integrated into an EOC-like environment and were able to effectively communicate and respond to the injects. Collectively, the group was able to answer the most challenging situations thoughtfully and effectively.

Participant Evaluation Form Results

Form Setup

The evaluation form had two parts: Part A consisted of a Likert formatted questionnaire. Part B consisted of a qualitative assessment in a short answer format to certain prompts.

Evaluation

Part A

The evaluation of Part A was determined based on selecting a level of agreement from 1-5, where 1 was strongly disagree, 3 was neutral, and 5 was strongly agree. All questions were created where a higher selection represented a more favorable view of the exercise in relation to the question being asked. The exercise would be deemed successful if the mean aggregate of all respondents' selections was greater than 3.2 on a 5.0 scale. The complete mean aggregate was 4.26, indicating a 1-point deviation positively from the success marker.

Part B

The evaluation of Part B is subjective both in terms of the respondent's answers to the prompts and the interpretation of the response by the facilitator.

Response #1: Please list 3 areas of strength from this exercise.

Respondents noted that A-State's readiness for emergency response seems to be in a good state, with key stakeholders well-trained and knowledgeable. Relationships with external partners are good, and internal partners seem to be able to collaborate on incident management objectives well. Players noted the campus emergency notification system as a key piece of infrastructure for response, and they evaluated that it would likely perform well in this scenario. Respondents appreciated the realism of the scenario and the ability to not be overwhelmed by injects. The guidebook was a good tool for players in the exercise.

Response #2: Please list 3 areas for improvement noted from this exercise.

Respondents noted the staffing for crowd control as an issue, as well as emergency access to the facility. Additionally, campus partners who would likely be part of an incident management team need additional training in preparation for an EOC activation. One respondent noted the potential benefit of having building liaisons to verify information and help in response operations. Many noted that additional departments/agencies should be involved in future exercises. Another player would like to see improvements in checking in on students/staff to verify safety. Improving communication plans to include a devolution/reconstitution plan between emergency officials and the Division of University Communications. Finally, improvements in collaboration with officials charged with response to hazardous materials incidents on campus as well as an increase in surveillance tools.

Response #3: What steps would you take to improve on issues identified in Response #2?

Respondents noted the importance of mutual aid to meet the resource needs of an incident, as well as expanding/outlining campus evacuation routes. Another recommends reviewing the incident management team at least once annually, as well as a meeting/exercise of those expected to staff the EOC. Additionally, we need to evaluate access to campus databases such as CampusOptics for emergency response personnel.

Areas of Strength

Strength 1 (Integration and Communication)

One of the strengths identified numerous times by players and the evaluator is the ability of campus leaders to quickly come together and offer their subject matter expertise in a helpful manner. Players were able to quickly integrate and effectively respond to the scenario/injects in a timely manner. **(Capability: Planning, Operational Coordination, Situational Assessment)**

Strength 2 (Emergency Notification System)

Another identified strength is the capabilities and redundancy of the campus emergency notification system, especially in its infrastructure design. The system can use numerous vehicles, both conventional and integrated, to be able to deliver a uniform message in a timely manner. **(Capability: Planning, Operational Coordination, Environmental Response, Situational Assessment)**

Strength 3 (Exercise Planning)

Respondents felt that this exercise was well planned and that the tools provided (e.g. presentation, guidebook, etc.) were helpful aids in navigating the exercise. The scenario and injects were realistic and achievable, while also stimulating thought and conversation. **(Capability: Planning)**

Areas for Improvement

Improvement Area 1 (EOC and IMT Integration Readiness)

An area that needs improvement is the maintenance of a campus Incident Management Team (IMT) as well as ongoing integration exercises and conversations surrounding an Emergency Operations Center (EOC) activation. The campus IMT needs to be identified and trained, and investments into a practical EOC need to be made. **(Capability: Planning, Operational Coordination)**

Improvement Area 2 (Communications Devolution and Reconstitution Plan)

Another area that needs improvement is crisis communications. While players were able to effectively identify the system and key stakeholders in crafting and delivering crisis communications, the university needs to evaluate at what point (if any) that communication duties transfer from the alerting authority to the Division of University Communications during incident management and then back based on incident needs and objectives. Additionally, the university must evaluate if this transition not only is needed but is feasible from an infrastructure standpoint. **(Capability: Planning, Operational Coordination, Situational Assessment)**

Improvement Area 3 (Stakeholder Communications)

An integral part of campus response and readiness is the ability of internal and external stakeholders to be equipped with the information needed to seamlessly transition into a multi-agency response. A major tool (especially for hazardous materials response) that is utilized on campus is CampusOptics. However, this database also contains sensitive information that does not need to be publicly accessible. The university needs to identify agencies and agency leaders with a need-to-know for access to this database, as well as other campus response plans. **(Capability: Planning, Situational Assessment)**

Improvement Plan

This IP is developed specifically for Arkansas State University as a result of the Lab Sciences Fire TTX conducted in July of 2024:

Area for Improvement	Corrective Item	Implementation Plan	Primary Responsible Organization	Organization POC
EOC and IMT Integration Readiness	Identification and Credentialing	Identify members of the campus IMT and work to provide credentials for these individuals. Set up a recurring process to evaluate the IMT for turnover.	Emergency Management (Primary)	Emergency Management: Wyatt Reed or Ronnie Gilley
	EOC Infrastructure	Work with ITS and Facilities Management to evaluate EOC infrastructure needs and gaps to obtaining target capability. Request funding to achieve the target capability.	Emergency Management (Primary) ITS & Facilities (Secondary)	Emergency Management Wyatt Reed or Ronnie Gilley ITS & Facilities Scott Wheat or Brian Lasey
	EOC Exercise	Once the first two corrective items are implemented, exercise to evaluate if the target capability can be met.	Emergency Management (Primary)	Emergency Management: Wyatt Reed or Ronnie Gilley
Communications Devolution and Reconstitution Plan	Evaluate Notification Infrastructure for Portability	Evaluate the campus emergency notification systems to see if the infrastructure can be moved, transferred, or operated remotely.	Emergency Management (Primary) University Police Department (Secondary)	Emergency Management Wyatt Reed or Ronnie Gilley University Police Department Randy Martin or Billy Branch

Area for Improvement	Corrective Item	Implementation Plan	Primary Responsible Organization	Organization POC
Policy Development	Evaluate the need (if any) for devolution and reconstitution of university emergency communications. If needed, draft policy and procedures into a plan.	University Communications (Primary) University Police Department (Secondary) Emergency Management (Tertiary)	University Communications Todd Clark University Police Department Randy Martin or Billy Branch Emergency Management (Tertiary) Wyatt Reed or Ronnie Gilley	
Stakeholder Communications	Data Sharing	The Office of Emergency Management will identify stakeholders that need access to internal data/databases. Access will be given after any necessary university security concerns are identified and mitigated or accepted.	Emergency Management (Primary)	Emergency Management: Wyatt Reed or Ronnie Gilley

[\[1\]](#) Selected from National Preparedness Goal's Five Mission Areas (DHS, 2015)

[\[2\]](#) Selected from National Preparedness Goal List of Core Capabilities (DHS, 2015)

[\[3\]](#) Selected from National Preparedness Goal List of Core Capabilities (DHS, 2015)

Revision #4

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