

June 2011

AFTER ACTION REPORT/IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Division A

Roosevelt County, MT

1 June 2011

Exercise Northern Alliance 2011



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Division (A) Exercise was developed to test Division A's EOC Management, Public Safety and Security Response, and Responder Safety and Health capabilities. The exercise planning team was composed of numerous and diverse agencies. Training and planning are critical elements of the preparedness program for any type of emergency incident, natural or otherwise. Division A recognizes its responsibilities to protect the public from, mitigate the consequences of, and respond in an appropriately integrated manner to the hazards associated with acts of terrorism, as well as to naturally occurring or technological disasters. Specific agencies and organizations holding responsibility for post-exercise improvement are specifically identified in Appendix A: Improvement Plan is contained in this report.

Homeland security preparedness involves a cycle of assessment, planning, capability development and organization, training, exercising, evaluation, and improvement. Successful exercises lead to an ongoing program of process improvements. This report is intended to assist Division A in achieving preparedness excellence by analyzing exercise results.

Based on the exercise planning team's deliberations, the following objectives were developed for Division A's Exercise:

Overall Objectives:

Objective 1: To improve the ability to use conventional and interface with the State-wide radio system used by first responders in their counties/jurisdictions and to validate their SOPs and business practices

Objective 2: Measure the success of the primary goal to expand coverage with Homeland Security funding in jurisdictions.

Objective 3: Measure the success to achieve the ability of jurisdictions, tribal nations, State & Federal and public safety users to have access to and use of the statewide communications system

Division A Objectives:

Objective 1: Measure the success of the jurisdictions ability to effectively open and maintain their Emergency Operations Center (EOC)

Objective 2: Measure the success of the jurisdictions ability in utilization of their Emergency Operations Plan.

Objective 3: Measure the success of the jurisdictions ability to effectively communicate across jurisdictional boundaries and emergency response disciplines.

The Division (A) exercise was a functional exercise (FE) designed to establish a learning environment for players to exercise emergency response plans, policies and procedures as they pertain to a local emergency incident. The communication portion of the exercise was established to test the functionality of the counties and regions interoperability communications in the event of a local emergency incident.

The purpose of this report is to analyze exercise results, identify strengths to be maintained and built upon, identify potential areas for further improvement, and support development of corrective actions.

Major Strengths

The major strengths identified during this exercise are as follows:

- Cooperation between regional counties and jurisdictions (this is a great plus)
- Establishment of the county EOC and the decision making process associated with staffing and operating the EOC in Sheridan County
- Dispatch office procedures in Sheridan County

Primary Areas for Improvement

Throughout the exercise, several opportunities for improvement in the county/divisions ability to respond to the incident were identified. The primary areas for improvement, including recommendations, are as follows:

- Communications SOP development and preparation by all counties and jurisdictions within the Division and region.
- Training for the Roosevelt County dispatch in incident management and large scale emergency operations.
- Continued development of interagency trunked radio use that includes the county and adjoining counties and jurisdictions.
- Finish the build out of the Northern Tier that will allow for completion of the technological improvements in the region. Defining what “finishing’ is will be the responsibility of the Northern Tier Consortium Board who will submit their findings to the Statewide Executive Committee currently managing public safety interoperable issues.

The exercise was a success, since it met expectations. Follow-up exercises should test specific improvements instituted as a result of this exercise and should include a focus on working within the ICS structure to manage a widespread regional emergency.

SECTION 1: EXERCISE OVERVIEW

Exercise Details

Exercise Name

Division (A) Exercise (Roosevelt County Functional Exercise)

Type of Exercise

Functional

Exercise Start Date

Wednesday 1 June 2011

Exercise End Date

Wednesday 1 June 2011

Duration

1 Day

Location

Roosevelt County, Sheridan County, Valley County, Phillips County

Sponsor

Broadwater County, MT

Mission

Response and Recovery

Capabilities

Communications; Incident Management;

Scenario Type

Multiple Bank Robberies in the lead county which contributes to additional events in adjoining counties.

Participating Organizations

Federal

U.S. Border Patrol

Office of Emergency Communications

BLM

State

Montana Highway Patrol

MT State DES

PSSB, State Of MT

Roosevelt County

Roosevelt County Sheriff's Office

Roosevelt County Dispatch (911)

Roosevelt County Commissioners

Office of Emergency Services / FECC

Roosevelt County Fire & Ambulance

Wolf Point Police Department

Sheridan County Sheriff

Sheridan County EOC, DES, Fire, Public Health, Dispatch and Border Patrol

Sheridan County Memorial Ambulance/EMS

Phillips County Sheriff, Dispatch, BLM, DES

Valley County Sheriff, Dispatch, Border patrol, DES

Ft Peck Tribal Police

SECTION 2: EXERCISE COMMUNICATIONS OBJECTIVES

Communications Exercise Purpose and Design

Exercise Objectives, Capabilities, and Activities

The exercise was designed to evaluate:

1. ***Incident Command System (ICS) Unified Command:*** Evaluate the local decision-making process and the capability to implement the ICS, and effective transition to a Unified Command in response to a specified incident. Examine the jurisdiction's ability to use various ICS functions.
2. ***Emergency Operations Center (EOC) operations:*** Exercise the jurisdiction's ability to activate staff and operate local EOCs in response to a specified incident.
3. ***Communications:*** Assess the ability to establish and maintain a multidisciplinary/multijurisdictional communications network during a response to a specified incident.
 - a) Measure the success of the primary goal to expand coverage with Homeland Security funding in jurisdictions.
 - b) Measure the success to achieve the ability of jurisdictions, tribal nations, State & Federal and public safety users to have access to and use of the statewide communications system.

Based upon the identified exercise objectives below, the exercise planning team has decided to demonstrate the following capabilities during this exercise:

Division Objectives:

Objective 1: To improve the ability to use conventional and interface with the State-wide radio system used by first responders in their counties/jurisdictions and to validate their SOPs and business practices

Objective 2: Measure the success of the primary goal of expanded coverage with Homeland Security funding in jurisdictions.

Objective 3: Measure the success to achieve the ability of jurisdictions, tribal nations, State & Federal and public safety users to have access to and use of the statewide communications system.

Division A Objectives:

Objective 1: Measure the success of the jurisdictions ability to effectively open and maintain their Emergency Operations Center (EOC)

Objective 2: Measure the success of the jurisdictions ability in utilization of their Emergency Operations Plan.

Objective 3: Measure the success of the jurisdictions ability to effectively communicate across jurisdictional boundaries and emergency response disciplines.

SECTION 3: ANALYSIS OF CAPABILITIES

CAPABILITY 1: Incident Command System (ICS) Unified Command:

Capability Summary: This capability was exercised by exposing participants to a situation in which they had to function, interact, and communicate through interoperable means in an Emergency Situation in response to, an incident; this was to be evaluated at the Incident Command Location and in the Dispatch.

Observation 1.1.1: *Area for Improvement:* Consolidated radio procedures and dispatch operations (Roosevelt County)

Analysis:

As the exercise began in Roosevelt County the dispatch appeared unprepared for this type of large scale response until the supervisor appeared on scene. Lack of knowledge about manuals that were available contributed to the confusion until the supervisor arrived. This is a significant training issue. Knowledge and use of the manuals would have lessened the impact of the appearance that the dispatch center lacked experience and capacity in coordination of multi-agency incident response. Conversely the dispatch in Sheridan County was very prepared and displayed preparedness and effective management of the situation.

Many of the Roosevelt county dispatch's problems can be traced to officers and deputies not monitoring their radios and not responding in a timely manner. There was an appearance of not fully taking the exercise seriously by the Roosevelt County Sheriff's office personnel and this resonated during their portion of the exercise.

The four counties dispatch centers worked well together during the course of the exercise period.

The technical abilities for this exercise were hindered greatly by the undelivered needs by vendors to complete fleet mapping and code plugging necessary to use the trunked system where it would be available in the four participating jurisdictions. This exercise for the most part in this division was more focused on the processes and training the jurisdictions will need to have while they continue to wait for vendors to meet their commitments to the jurisdictions to be able to use the technology that should have been available during this particular exercise.

Recommendations:

1. Conduct training to ensure that all agencies identified are capable of operating within ICS/UCS/IMS. This may involve individual training and or re-training in

certain areas of responsibility. Coordinate incident site communications to be consistent with NIMS framework.

2. Stress the importance of the exercise to overall public safety response and incident management to those participating in the exercise. Those participating will at the end of the day “get out” of the exercise what they “put into it”, ignoring events and presenting an overall lack of participation up front does not help those looking to gain something useful from the exercise.
3. The Dispatch offices in Valley, Sheridan and Phillips counties all worked well during the exercise.

CAPABILITY 2: Emergency Operations Center (EOC) operations:

Capability Summary: EOC operations, was evaluated for the exercise as one of the objectives of the Division. The EOC was never fully opened and did not become fully operation during the period of the exercise. In Sheridan County the EOC was activated and although was manned on a limited basis did allow decision makers to exercise the process of activation on a limited scale.

A significant issue in Sheridan County in the EOC was the inexperience and understanding of public health as to what the EOC functions are during an incident. Public health attempted to manage and direct operations that are the responsibility of the IMT versus provide the support to the IMT during operation and tactical response the EOC is suppose to accomplish.

Observation 2.1.1: *Area for Improvement:* **General EOC operations**

Analysis: This section will address the non participation of the Roosevelt County EOC during the exercise. Sheridan County is not included in this Analysis.

As the exercise scenario was designed around an incident that started in Roosevelt County it was expected that the EOC would activate to support operations in the county. Activation did not occur anytime during the exercise, nor was the decision process ever initiated as to overall incident command and response. It is not clear as to where the decision would be made to activate the EOC consistent with the counties EOP. It is clear however the Sheriff’s office did not see the importance of activating the EOC for support.

Recommendations:

1. Disseminate guidelines and procedures for EOC activation to the decision makers within the county. Participation is required at the high level to encourage those identified as players in the exercise to participate.
2. Include for those involved a statement regarding exercise support in their yearly evaluations goals and objectives. Hold mandatory pre-exercise briefings for the county players that are lead by the Commissioners and the Sheriff, these displays “buy in” of the exercise and its importance to the community.
3. Encourage more tabletop exercises to be conducted on a regional level.

CAPABILITY 3: COMMUNICATIONS

Capability Summary: Communication is the fundamental capability within disciplines and jurisdictions that practitioners need to perform the most routine and basic elements of their job functions. Agencies must be operable, meaning they possess sufficient wireless communications capabilities to meet their daily internal and emergency communications requirements before they focus on interoperability.

A continuous flow of critical information is maintained as needed among multi-jurisdictional and multi-disciplinary emergency responders, command posts, agencies, and governmental officials for the duration of the emergency response operation in compliance with National Incident Management System (NIMS). To accomplish this, the jurisdiction has a continuity of operations plan for public safety communications to include the consideration of critical components, networks, support systems, personnel, and an appropriate level of redundant communications systems in the event of an emergency.

Observation 3.1.1: *Area for Improvement:* The exercise showed a basic need for more concise and updated SOPs

Analysis: SOPs are critical to the success of any communications plan. The fact that all counties and jurisdictions participating in the exercise need to produce and or update their current SOPs cannot be overstated.

Recommendations:

1. Ensure that an SOP is developed between all responders within the county. This must be a coordinated effort by all involved. This should be based on a tiered communications response system that works hand in hand with the capabilities of the trunked radio system and the state wide mutual aid frequency plan.

2. Secure buy-in by all departments involved by having them sign a copy of the SOP once it is developed. The SOP then needs to be tested on a regular basis for various levels of validity and operational functionality. This can be done through the use of interagency Commexs and or Functional exercises that bring multiple agencies together. Involve adjoining counties and jurisdictions in the development of the SOP and have separate annexes for those adjoining entities in the mutual aid responsibilities section.

SECTION 4: CONCLUSION

The Roosevelt County Exercise was the second functional exercise to test the overall interoperability of multiple counties and jurisdictions on a large scale within the State. Exercise participants demonstrated an initial capability to:

- Respond to an emergency and establish Incident Command communications
- Work through communications problems and determine a solution
- Identify plans, policies, and procedures that require updating or changing.

Participants completed all planned exercise objectives, exceeding exercise expectations by operating and coordinating with one another under the Incident Command System functions. Participants established and maintained communication with other agencies throughout the response, thus successfully completing the exercise objectives and of their own Division/Jurisdictions and also learning more about the roles and capabilities of other agencies.

Exercise Participants identified several recommendations for improvements in each of the county's ability to respond to a major incident. Major recommendations include:

- Increased training in the Incident Command System (ICS) Additional multi-discipline tabletop and functional exercises to allow for further participation in unified command scenarios that include communications drills and exercises.
- Continued development of inter-agency working relationships.
- Cross-walking of the EOP with individual agency emergency response plans to ensure an integration of identified roles and responsibilities.

The counties can use the results of this exercise to further refine plans, procedures, and training for a major disaster type incident. Additional exercises should be conducted to test the improvements instituted as a result of this exercise, as well as to further foster an environment of communication, networking, and education among county members.

Participation by the U.S. Border patrol during the exercise cannot be understated. They were a welcome addition to the overall exercise and their participation has directly led to changes in some communications operation initiatives already along the Northern Tier.

APPENDIX A: LESSONS LEARNED

While the After Action Report/Improvement Plan includes recommendations which support development of specific post-exercise corrective actions, exercises may also reveal lessons learned which can be shared with the broader homeland security audience. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) maintains the *Lessons Learned Information Sharing* (LLIS.gov) system as a means of sharing post-exercise lessons learned with the emergency response community. This appendix provides jurisdictions and organizations with an opportunity to nominate lessons learned from exercises for sharing on *LLIS.gov*.

For reference, the following is the definitions used in *LLIS.gov*:

- **Lesson Learned:** Knowledge and experience, positive or negative, derived from actual incidents, such as the 9/11 attacks and Hurricane Katrina, as well as those derived from observations and historical study of operations, training, and exercises.

Exercise Lessons Learned

The exercise produced certain lessons learned that could prove useful for other responding personnel and those looking to improve the interoperability of their communications means.

- A commitment to the exercise from the appointed lead county is critical to overall exercise success. Roosevelt County while adequately supporting the exercise did not take advantage of the operational level of training that the exercise brought to the jurisdiction. Much was learned and gathered about the communication process within the county and the region.
- Roosevelt County needs to ensure that their dispatch office is trained in large scale emergency operations. Daily operations are one thing in the dispatch office; however operations in the event of a large scale emergency involve an enhanced skill set of procedures and knowledge.
- All Counties involved need to work closely with its adjoining counties and jurisdictions in the preparation of their communications SOP and, if necessary, lay down procedures and protocols to access resources outside of their jurisdiction during times of crisis.
- Interoperability starts with understanding frequency use, training, planning and tabletop exercises, while preparedness leads to strengthened and established relationships. You cannot expect to be interoperable on the radio during an event if you're not interoperable in the conference room when things are quiet. It's important to strengthen or establish relationships between and amongst the counties administrators and responders of all agencies involved in the provision of public safety services in a jurisdiction and amongst surrounding jurisdictions.

APPENDIX B: IMPROVEMENT PLAN

The improvement plan associated with Roosevelt County and Division (A) is one that involves coordination and collaboration to achieve the desired outcome of a consolidated Communications SOP for the County. This can be accomplished by leveraging the assets of the counties DES office and input from all county agencies, (Law Enforcement, Fire, EMS, etc)

#	Observation Title	Recommendation	Corrective Action Description	Primary Responsible Agency	Completion Date
1	Not all agencies were following the ICS 205 Communications Plan	Continue to use the ICS 205 to increase familiarity with the form	Continue to utilize the ICS 205 during all exercises and drills as well as real events, planned or spontaneous	All Agencies	Ongoing
2	Involvement from Roosevelt County	Get a total buy-in from the decision makers within the county, hold pre-briefings from the commissioners and the Sheriff.	Ownership is important and you must establish it for an exercise to succeed.	Commissioners DES Coordinator County Sheriff	Before the next exercise
3	SOP development and procedures along with NIMS integrated SOPs	Develop usable SOPs that involve development from adjoining counties and jurisdictions	Build SOPS in conjunction with what is operationally supportable	DES Coordinator 911 Directors All Agencies	April 2012
4	Implementation of ICS protocols and standards	Initiate an educational plan to educate those involved	To implement ICS standards those involved must understand them first, this is where education is important and entry level short course can be presented.	DES Coordinators	April 2012
5	Dispatch training in Roosevelt County	Conduct incident management training for the Roosevelt County dispatch members	Incident training and large scale emergency response training is needed for the dispatchers and can be conducted locally in short 20 minute blocks for 4 weeks. Use assets in Sheridan County for some of the training	DES Coordinator 911 Directors	April 2012
6	Finish the Build out of the Northern Tier	Complete the initial infrastructure work and the additionally awarded Grant projects that complete the Northern Tier.	Assessment by the Northern Tier Consortium, that recommends projects for completion to the SIGB	Northern Tier Consortium	June 2012
7	Vendors completion of the delivery of technology	Completion by the vendors of delivering technology to the jurisdiction , i.e. "code plug development"	Finish the deliverable technology upgrades	Vendors	May 2012