




Homeland Security

August 17, 2010

MEMORANDUM FOR: W. Craig Fugate
Administrator, Federal Emergency Management Agency

All DHS Components

FROM: Janet Napolitano 
Secretary

SUBJECT: National Exercise Program

I believe an effective exercise program is the cornerstone of our nation's collective preparedness and resilience. Only by testing the ways we leverage our federal, state, local and tribal partnerships can we be sure of the effectiveness of our plans for preventing, responding to and recovering from disasters and acts of terrorism and the preparedness of those charged with supporting and protecting the American people. A national exercise program must focus not only on the front lines of prevention, protection, response and recovery—our nation's first responders—but also engage elected and appointed leadership at all levels of government, the public and the private sector. Much has been accomplished through the implementation of the first generation of a national exercise program, however it is also critical that we continue to improve these programs, and to that end, I am ordering my Department to implement steps that will continue the important evolution of our National Exercise Program.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is responsible for establishing and implementing a National Exercise Program that responds to and satisfies the requirements of the Department and the entire Homeland Security enterprise, including state, local and tribal governments, the federal interagency, non-profits, the private sector and the public. Given this administration's requirements for the National Exercise Program and the lessons learned over the past many years, I direct FEMA, with the cooperation of all other necessary DHS components, to provide to me no later than 90 days from today a revised National Exercise Program based on the existing program and incorporating the following tenets, principles, and structures:

1) Develop a two-year progressive exercise program that increases the total number of exercises and culminates in a full-scale, biennial intergovernmental National Level Exercise (NLE). A progressive exercise program should consist of a series of much more frequent, smaller-scale drills, tabletops, and functional exercises, culminate in a single national level full-scale exercise, and meet objectives established by principals as well as partners, operational elements, and legal requirements. At a minimum, the overarching program should consist of the following elements:

a) Drills should be primarily no notice, or limited notice, and be conducted periodically during the two-year cycle by partners across DHS and the interagency, focusing on testing a single specific operation or function. Also known as 'Thunderbolts,' these short-duration, small scale exercises should be conducted at both the operational element level (e.g. USCG field elements, CBP field elements, the NOC, the NRCC, RRCCs etc.) and the policy level (e.g. communications tests among senior staff, COOP, etc). Drill objectives should support overall exercise program objectives, but additional drills can be conducted in series to test additional objectives, plans, and proficiency.

b) Tabletop exercises should be conducted at various levels focusing on policy matters and lines of authority, starting at the very broad and introductory level for the first one or two exercises, and rapidly increasing in complexity for the balance of the two year period. These exercises should continue to include players traditionally participating in Principal Level Exercises, but they should also be reformed to resemble policy meetings such as those conducted as Principal Committee, Deputies Committee, and Interagency Policy Committees (PCtx, DCtx, IPCtx etc.). These should be non-scripted policy and/or authority debates centered on a small number of key points of deliberation that would likely rise to the respective policy level. Their design will be adjusted over time to reflect the maturation of these bodies over the course of an administration.

c) Functional level exercises should be conducted in which a group of participants within a department, the interagency, or intergovernmental community works in settings such as they would experience during an actual event, but do not incorporate field level elements or the movement of assets and resources. They may combine operations in various emergency operations centers at multiple levels of government, the National Response Coordination Center, Regional Response Coordination Centers, the National Operations Center, various departmental operations centers, and the White House Situation Room. They may be conducted with full notice to evaluate the effectiveness and validity of plans and procedures, or with no notice as large scale 'thunderbolts' to evaluate the proficiency of personnel and effectiveness of training, plans, and procedures.

d) The capstone event of the progressive exercise program should be a full-scale intergovernmental National Level Exercise combining the elements and progressive lessons of the various drills, tabletops, and functional exercises into a multiday, intergovernmental exercise. This should combine the functional decision-making elements with actual 'boots-on-the-ground' responders, with exercise elements driven by field actions rather than purely by scripted injects. This should not preclude full scale exercises from being conducted throughout the two year cycle by any component, Federal department or agency, or state, local, or tribal partner.

2) The success of any exercise should be judged on whether it was worthwhile and effective in meeting stated objectives and expected performance. This administration understands and believes in the importance of exercising and requires that the most senior levels of government are involved in all aspects. The planning for each two-year exercise program should start with principal level initial planning meetings to identify the overall objectives, series parameters, and limits, conducted, at a minimum, with myself and the Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and

Counterterrorism. As changes occur to strategic or operational conditions, principals should revisit objectives, parameters and limits.

3) Effective exercises also must truly evaluate the ability of the players to implement plans and procedures while understanding the capabilities, boundaries and limits to their agencies and governments. Exercises conducted under the National Exercise Program (to include Principal and Deputies level), should, when consistent with objectives, be conducted with the minimum amount of advance notice, preparation and scripting on the part of the players, and in a no-fault environment to facilitate learning.

4) As the cornerstone of an effective preparedness system, an exercise program provides the evaluation of the validity and efficacy of doctrine, planning, training, as well as capability. The National Exercise Program should include a comprehensive system of performance assessment and tracking of the implementation of issues identified for remediation.

5) I also direct FEMA to begin working immediately with the National Security Staff to examine and revise where necessary the interagency governance system for the National Exercise Program—including partnership and cooperation with state local and tribal governments and interagency planning bodies. This structure should be designed and established to support the National Exercise Program and facilitate the interagency and intergovernmental roles in developing exercises rooted in the requirements of senior levels of the various agencies and governments. The interagency governance structure should be organized in such a way to expedite the review and publication of after-action reports and track the implementation of corrective actions.

6) I understand that under the current National Exercise Program, NLEs are conducted every 12 months, and that much work and planning has gone into NLE11. Additionally, I believe it is important that a two-year progressive series build from exercise to exercise and function as a coherent, progressive whole, based on objectives and not simply scenarios. Therefore, pending the submission and approval of a new National Exercise Program, I direct FEMA to continue the planning for NLE11, in cooperation with the various partners, while designing and conducting it to the maximum degree practicable according to the principles outlined above. I further direct FEMA to conduct a cyber terrorism exercise as planned for NLE12, and with the exception of the biennial nature of the culminating exercise, to adhere to the above principles in total. In the design of a National Exercise Program, FEMA should plan for the implementation of a two-year progressive program to commence with the beginning of calendar year 2013.

cc: John Brennan
Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism