



# Situation Manual

## Emergency Scenario: Facilitated Discussion

Presented at: *Faith Community and Emergency Responders Forum – 2012*

Coordinated by Faith Community Partnering for Emergency Preparedness

A Project of the Western Region Homeland Security Advisory Council

## **Introduction**

This activity is a facilitated discussion designed to encourage participants to consider and discuss their actions, roles, and responsibilities in the case of an event such as the one described in the scenario. There are no right or wrong answers. Exercises, drills, and workshops provide an opportunity to review, explore and develop plans and protocols so that we are better prepared to respond to emergencies and disasters in our communities. This particular discussion will also permit you to share with others what your needs are and what resources you would like to bring to your community's response.

There are many capabilities that organizations must develop and assess in order to be prepared to participate in a response. Today's activity focuses primarily on communication and coordination – with the public and with your organization, congregation or agency, as well as with your response partners.

If you find that this activity is beneficial for you, we encourage you to seek out and participate in exercises, drills, and workshops in your community. You will have the chance to walk through the role you might play in an emergency, and you will meet some of the people in your community who will be your response partners.

## **Description of activity**

We will present a scenario in three sections. Each section is accompanied by questions that apply to the material in the scenario. Discuss these questions in your small groups, appointing someone to function as facilitator and someone else to take notes. You are not expected to finish all the questions in the limited time allotted – they simply represent some of the tasks and challenges you may face should a situation such as this actually arise. And don't be discouraged if you don't already have all of the answers; the purpose of events such as this is to identify opportunities for you to enhance your plans before you need to use them.

At the conclusion of the third section, we will return to the group as a whole for summary and commentary.

## **Acknowledgements**

This scenario was adapted from a tabletop exercise produced by Nancy Jane Murphy of the Disability Law Center for the Western MA IRAA Preparedness Project, which was supported by the Western Massachusetts Regional Homeland Security Advisory Council. With questions or comments about this activity or scenario, please contact:

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## Section One

Monday, February 29, 9:00 AM

It is morning in a downtown area of the County. People are making their way along the mushy and icy sidewalks of Main Street in the busy business district on their way to work and shopping in the area. One block away from Main Street is a large apartment building complex which includes elderly, Section 8, and student housing.

You are at your house of worship on Rolling Hills Road, which is several blocks away, but safely on top of a large hill and accessible via open roads that come from the other side of the hill. You hear sirens, a few at first but then many. Concerned, you turn on the radio.

“This is a Breaking News Update. There are few details at this time, but it seems that just minutes ago there was break in the dam off of Main Street. Officials say they believe that the record heavy rains experienced over the past week and the now-freezing temperatures with expanding ice are responsible for the failure of the dam. We have reports that hundreds of people will be ordered to evacuate and that many are already without power and trapped by rising water in the streets....”

### KEY POINTS

- At the present time, your facility is undamaged by the flooding.
- Many people are going to be displaced from their homes.
- You need reliable and up-to-date information to know what to do next.

### KEY QUESTIONS

1. If these events happened in real life, how would you learn of the flooding? Who would you try to call? Who would you want to hear from?
2. Your buildings are safe for the moment. What if they too are reached by flood waters? What are your essential services and functions that might be threatened by this event? How will you continue to provide your essential services and safeguard your essential functions?
3. Will you reach out to members of your community at this time? If so, how will you reach them and what will you be telling them?
4. What contacts will you make at this time with emergency partners in your community? How and to whom will you reach out?

## Section Two

Monday, February 29, 4:45 PM

The lower third of your town is flooded. Emergency response personnel from your town and surrounding communities are working to rescue trapped residents. Fortunately, your buildings are high and dry, with access via the one small road that comes over the hill. Power and phones are out across most of the town, and as the afternoon lengthens the temperature begins to drop. You worry about everyone who hasn't yet made it to a safe warm place, especially about a few of the members of your congregation who live in a particularly hard-hit neighborhood – from whom you have heard nothing since this incident began.

### KEY POINTS

- You have power for the moment, and your buildings are unaffected by the floodwaters, but you don't have reliable/consistent phone service.
- Elsewhere in your town, it is getting colder and darker and people are being evacuated from their homes.
- Some of the members of your community are unaccounted for.

### KEY QUESTIONS

1. How will you maintain contact with the members of your community? With your emergency response partners? What organizations will you be working with at this point? How will you coordinate your activities with other organizations?
2. How will your community set up and operate a shelter? To where will evacuees be brought or directed while the shelter is being set up? What role will your organization play in the sheltering process?
3. How will you help your congregation, your community members and your volunteers cope with the spiritual and psychological challenges presented by these events?
4. What will be your response to this emergency at this time? Do you need help from your emergency response partners? What kind of help?
5. Do you have resources that you would like to share with your emergency response partners/the community at large? What are they, and how do you go about sharing them?

## Section Three

Friday, March 4

Four days after the breach of the dam, a third of the community remains flooded. There have been several confirmed fatalities, and five people are still missing. Power, landline phone service, and water are still out, but there are rumors that they will be back on line soon.

Some of your community members had to “shelter in place.” Several people refused to leave their homes for fear of looters. Many of these people come into your building every day, just to get warmed up and have a hot drink. Others have sought shelter with family members or friends, and some are staying in an emergency shelter. It is unclear how long this situation will last, but the standing water everywhere makes people fear that it will be several more days at least.

Three members of your congregation are still unaccounted for, including an elderly woman with arthritis who lives alone. You hope that they managed to get out of town early on, and that they are staying with relatives.

### KEY POINTS

- Your building is undamaged; you have power.
- People in the community see you as a refuge.
- A few members of your congregation are unaccounted for.
- The emergency isn’t over and may continue for at least another few days.

### KEY QUESTIONS

1. Do the members of your congregation have “72-hour kits” or other emergency supplies that would help them if they had to shelter in place? If not, what do they need to do to enhance their personal and family preparedness? Is it a function of your congregation to help them do this?
2. Are you attempting to “check in” with all of your members? How are you doing this? Do you have a plan for what to do if you can’t locate a particular person? What other agencies might you turn to for help?
3. What channels of communication can you use to keep your congregation and your community up to date when power and phone lines are unreliable?
4. What do your emergency response partners need from you, and you from them? How are you maintaining communication with them on an ongoing basis?

## **Summary/Conclusion**

What are some of the steps you can take now to get ready for an event such as this?

How will you communicate and coordinate during an emergency?

What can you do to help your community in this crisis?

How will you enhance and expand your working relationships with your emergency response partners as we go forward?