



## The Merit of Emergency Planning and Exercises

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On Friday the 14<sup>th</sup> of July 2017 An Garda Síochána conducted a counter terrorism exercise in Dublin city centre. The scenario simulated had elements consistent with real life terrorist attacks in Western Europe in the last 18 months. Most noticeable of these was that the scenario involved a van driven at pedestrians. Two perpetrators then left the scene on foot, armed with a knife and gun, and went into a train station where they confronted other members of the public. An Garda Síochána responded to a report of a traffic accident. After assessing the situation, the uniformed gardai called for back-up and as the scenario played out support came from other uniformed gardai, armed gardai, the dog unit, amongst others. One perpetrator was detained by An Garda Síochána, while the second boarded a train, where he took hostages and negotiations ensued.

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The counter terrorism exercise conducted by An Garda Síochána positively illustrates a number of key important components when conducting emergency planning and response exercise. For example, An Garda Síochána stated that they were preparing for this exercise for some time and had conducted a table top exercise in advance a number of weeks ago. While members were told it was a training exercise, they were not informed of the exact elements of the exercise. Those planning the exercise drew on trends and MOs used in recent attacks elsewhere to inform the exercise. These elements are important, their inclusion means the exercise is more realistic and therefore a better learning opportunity for all involved. The exercise also included a number of different elements, having an active stage and a protracted negotiation stage. The inclusion of both is significant and is positive as both elements require different responses, thereby testing different skills sets. The exercise was also said to have been informed by previous training scenarios, some of which were conducted with other agencies in the past. This is significant in a positive sense, in that the better planned these incidents are, the better the learning opportunity is from them. Furthermore, exercises that build on each other and add additional layers of complexity help build confidence, trust and competence for all involved.

### Types of exercises

There are 4 main types of exercises, which if conducted in order can help to maximise emergency response capabilities. These are set out below.

1. Discussion-based planning
  - Not resource intensive and relatively easy to prepare.
2. Table top & walk through exercise
  - Require preparation and planning; good at validating opportunities and weaknesses
  - Help build confidence and competence in staff
  - Identify planning and procedural deficiencies within and/or across organisations.
3. Functional exercises
  - Rehearsal of implementation, test logistics, communications & physical capabilities
  - Opportunity to clarify roles and responsibilities
  - Get feedback
  - Test and validate plans and responses.
4. Full scale live exercises
  - Expensive and resource intensive
  - Test all aspects in a scenario as close to a real life situation as possible.

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### **The merit of conducting simulated exercise**

Planning is only one element of emergency management. It cannot be deemed effective unless it is exercised and tested. The purpose of simulated exercises are largely threefold; to validate, train and test. Such exercises help validate plans, train people to respond effectively by developing confidence and competence, and test well-established procedures and amend when necessary. They are not conducted to catch people or organisations out. They are an important means to test procedures, while at the same time developing people's competence and confidence to respond. Training is an important element too as people may not have the necessary skills to respond in the desired manner. Exercises provide opportunity to identify these needs. Additionally by conducting such exercises and by providing training, it helps to reduce the chance that people or organisations get overwhelmed when a serious incident occurs. The ability to respond effectively in crisis situations is key to reducing the impact of incidents as and when they occur. In the real world this is likely to mean a coordinated response by multiple agencies. Therefore, discussion and planning between organisations is important. Such cooperation can also help in the following areas:

- Exchange of information and knowledge between other agencies in relation to policies, procedures, protocols and response
- Identify training needs within and between organisations
- Identify opportunities for better coordination of responses
- Improve capabilities within and between organisations.

### **Using simulations as a training exercise**

Conducting real life-like simulations from start to finish with multiple agencies involved are resource intensive. Therefore, in-house preparation is important in advance of joint exercise. A way of maximising learning from in-house exercises can be achieved by allowing, where possible, key members from other agencies likely to be involved if a real incident was to occur to watch such training. This will allow them to ensure their policies and procedure are in line with potential partners.

### **What not to forget when conducting exercises**

Despite the high intensity situations simulated in these types of exercise, a lot goes on in the background in a real life situation that often goes untrained. This can greatly hinder responses in the real world. For example, once an incident, similar to that simulated by An Garda Síochána, occurs and a threat(s) is identified, members of a police force will be gathering as much intelligence from the incident as possible to inform both the response at the incident, but also in an attempt to identify further threats, accomplices, key locations, networks, etc. Other activities will relate to coordinated communications, whether this be with other units within the force, or with other agencies and bodies outside. Communication with the media is also vital. There will be many other activities unfolding in tandem with the actual incident. Therefore, training and preparation in these areas is also important.

### **Who should be conducting such exercises?**

Exercises, especially those conducted in respect to security threats, natural disasters or accidents are best conducted by the relevant emergency service. Yet this does not mean that non-emergency service organisations or private bodies do not have to do anything. Rigorous testing across any organisation is important as it helps ensure an appropriate coordinated response, if and when the need arises. Therefore, all organisations should develop, maintain and test emergency plans and responses. In a changing security environment, private organisations and other bodies have a duty of care to do so to their employees. That said, all staff should be involved in emergency planning. Security is everyone's responsibility, as is emergency response. Therefore, appropriate training should be provided as needs are identified. If key staff are not trained and competent in conducting risk assessment, business continuity management and emergency planning these skills may need to be brought in; ignoring risk should not be an option.