

FOUO

Massachusetts Department of Public Health
After Action Report/Improvement Plan
(AAR/IP)

MRC Communications Protocols
Tabletop Exercise

MRC Communications Protocols TTX

June 24, 2010

AFTER ACTION REPORT/IMPROVEMENT PLAN

July 1, 2010

Prepared by:

Massachusetts Department of Public Health

Emergency Preparedness Bureau

FOUO

FOUO

Massachusetts Department of Public Health
**After Action Report/Improvement Plan
(AAR/IP)**

**MRC Communications Protocols
Tabletop Exercise**

This page is intentionally blank.

FOUO

HANDLING INSTRUCTIONS

1. The title of this document is the MRC Communications Protocols TTX AAR/IP
2. The information gathered in this AAR/IP is classified as For Official Use Only (FOUO) and should be handled as sensitive information not to be disclosed. This document should be safeguarded, handled, transmitted, and stored in accordance with appropriate security directives. Reproduction of this document, in whole or in part, without prior approval from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health is prohibited.
3. At a minimum, the attached materials will be disseminated only on a need-to-know basis and when unattended, will be stored in a locked container or area offering sufficient protection against theft, compromise, inadvertent access, and unauthorized disclosure.
4. Points of Contact:

State MRC POC:

Michael Coughlin
Local Public Health Manager-State MCR Coordinator
Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Emergency Preparedness Bureau
250 Washington St., 1st floor
Boston, MA 02108
617-624-5091 - office
617-279-5639 - cell
Michael.coughlin@state.ma.us

Exercise Director:

Roberta Clarke, MEP
Exercise & Training Manager
Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Emergency Preparedness Bureau
250 Washington St., 1st floor
Boston, MA 02108
617-624-5721 - office
617-217-8158 - cell
Roberta.clarke@state.ma.us

This page is intentionally blank.

CONTENTS

Administrative Handling Instructions	1
Contents	3
Executive Summary	5
Section 1: Exercise Overview	7
Exercise Details	7
Exercise Planning Team Leadership	7
Participating Organizations	7
Section 2: Exercise Design Summary	9
Exercise Purpose and Design	9
Capabilities and Activities Identified for Demonstration	9
Scenario Summary	9
Section 3: Analysis of Capabilities	10
Communications	10
Section 4: Conclusion	12
Appendix A: Improvement Plan	13
Appendix B: Lessons Learned	15
Appendix C: Acronyms	16

This page is intentionally blank.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The MRC Communications Protocols tabletop exercise was developed to test the Communication capability. The exercise planning team was composed of personnel from the Emergency Preparedness Bureau within the Department of Public Health. Based on the exercise planning team's deliberations, the following objectives were developed for the exercise

- Evaluate the efficacy of the communications procedures outlined in the Communications Protocols for contacting and deploying MRCs to respond to emergencies or other incidents outside their own jurisdiction.
- Raise awareness among the 45 MRC units about the communication procedures for contacting and deploying MRCs to respond to emergencies or other incidents outside their own jurisdiction.

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:

- The Communications Protocols made sense to those involved and most felt they would be helpful in an emergency
- MRC Coordinators are well prepared to contact and communicate with their volunteers in an emergency
- Having a central location for requests for MRC volunteers and the ability to track those volunteers is very beneficial

Primary Areas for Improvement

Throughout the exercise, several opportunities for improvement to be made to the Communications Protocols were identified. The primary areas for improvement, including recommendations, are as follows:

- It was identified that the ESF-8 desk should always check with the affected community regarding available MRC resources prior to reaching out to outside communities
- There should be additional safety information requested from shelters looking for volunteers such as road conditions, if they should bring food or medical supplies, etc.
- The Communications Protocols rely heavily on HHAN and telephone communications. HHAN contact information needs to be continually updated, and if

power was out or landlines down perhaps HAM radios could be used and incorporated into the Procedure.

- Additional exercises such as this need to be conducted in the Regions in order to ensure all MRC Coordinators are aware of the Communications Protocols and how they will work in an emergency

Overall participants felt this exercise was very helpful and worthwhile. There was very good discussion among participants and many ideas both inside and outside the scope of this exercise were brought up and talked through. Given that this was the first test of these procedures, the exercise definitely appears to validate the procedures, while also allowing for some additional insight regarding some supplementary language that may be added to further strengthen them.

SECTION 1: EXERCISE OVERVIEW

Exercise Details

Exercise Name

MRC Communications Protocols Tabletop Exercise

Type of Exercise

Tabletop

Exercise Date

June 24, 2010

Duration

2 hours

Location

Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency

Sponsor

Massachusetts Department of Public Health

Mission

Response

Capabilities

Communications

Scenario Type

Hurricane

Exercise Planning Team

Roberta Clarke, Exercise & Training Manager
Michael Coughlin, State MRC Coordinator
Lindsay Tallon, Health Volunteer Program Manager

Participating Organizations

American Red Cross
Amherst MRC / UMass MRC
Boston MRC
Brookline MRC
Burlington BOH / MRC
Cape Cod MRC
Department of Public Health Emergency Preparedness Bureau
Franklin County MRC
GNB MRC Dartmouth
Grafton MRC

Greater Fall River Medical Reserve Corps
Greater River Valley MRC
Greater Westfield & Western Hampden County MRC
Hampshire County MRC
Haverhill Police Dept. Northeastern MRC
Holyoke MRC
MRC Bristol -Norfolk
MRC Western MA
Mystic Valley MRC
Newton MRC Newton HHS
Randolph MRC
Region 4B MRC
Topsfield Regional MRC
Westford / Upper MK MRC
Wilbraham MRC Coordinator

Number of Participants

- Players: 28
- Evaluators: 1
- Facilitators: 1
- Observers: 2

SECTION 2: EXERCISE DESIGN SUMMARY

Exercise Purpose and Design

During the 2008 Ice Storm, the need for a coordinated approach to requesting; activating and dispatching medical/MRC personnel to shelters was identified. As a result, the “Communications Protocols for Coordination of Shelter Volunteer Requests” was created by the MRC Shelter Workgroup. The purpose of this exercise is to provide members of the MRC Steering Committee with an opportunity to work through the protocols during various scenarios and to raise awareness among the 45 MRC units in the Commonwealth about the communication procedures for contacting and deploying MRCs to respond to emergencies or other incidents outside of their own jurisdiction.

Exercise Objectives and Capability

Capabilities-based planning allows for exercise planning teams to develop exercise objectives and observe exercise outcomes through a framework of specific action items that were derived from the Target Capabilities List (TCL). The capabilities listed below form the foundation for the organization of all objectives and observations in this exercise. Additionally, each capability is linked to several corresponding activities and tasks to provide additional detail.

Based upon the identified exercise objectives below, the exercise planning team decided to demonstrate the Communications capability during this exercise:

- Evaluate the efficacy of the communications procedures outlined in the Communications Protocols for contacting and deploying MRCs to respond to emergencies or other incidents outside their own jurisdiction.
- Raise awareness among the 45 MRC units about the communication procedures for contacting and deploying MRCs to respond to emergencies or other incidents outside their own jurisdiction.

Scenario Summary

This exercise used a hurricane scenario to demonstrate the pre-planning that would be occurring prior to landfall and then to implement the MRC Communications Protocols post-landfall.

SECTION 3: ANALYSIS OF CAPABILITIES

This section of the report reviews the performance of the exercised capabilities, activities, and tasks. In this section, observations are organized by capability and associated activities. The capabilities linked to the exercise objectives of MRC Communications Protocols TTX are listed below, followed by corresponding activities. Each activity is followed by related observations, which include references, analysis, and recommendations.

CAPABILITY 1: COMMUNICATIONS

Capability Summary:

Communications is the fundamental capability within disciplines and jurisdictions that practitioners need to perform the most routine and basic elements of their job functions.

Activity 1.1: Alert and Dispatch

Observation 1.1: *Strength/Area for Improvement* – During the discussions for both Modules 1 and 2 participants demonstrated their ability to implement their notification plans to contact volunteers to both alert them to an impending need for their services and to contact them following an event when they needed to be activated. Personnel from the Red Cross and the Department of Public Health also demonstrated their knowledge and ability in the implementation of the MRC Communications Protocols.

1. **References:** Local MRC notification procedures; Communications Protocols for Coordination of Shelter Volunteer Requests During Multi-Community Events

Analysis: Although participants demonstrated their ability to notify MRC volunteers and implement the MRC Communications Protocols, there were several items mentioned that should be included in an update to the Protocols. One participant mentioned that the affected community should be contacted prior to contacting other communities to determine the availability of MRC resources. Additionally, another participant noted that the Communications Protocols rely heavily on the telephone communications. He suggested the use of HAM radio operators since some MRC units have this capability and so does MEMA. Current communications information about contacting the ESF-8 desk during an emergency is relayed through use of the HHAN, and it was noted that all MRC coordinators should make sure that their contact details are up to date in the HHAN system. Participants also determined that the information that is to be asked when someone requests resources was not robust enough and should include specifics for volunteer safety like local road conditions; the need for volunteers to bring food or medical supplies, etc. Finally, it was mentioned that requests from emergency management were not included in the Communications Protocols and that this information should be added.

Recommendations:

1. Include language in the Protocols to ensure the local community affected by the event is contacted first to establish their MRC availability prior to requesting volunteers from outside the local community.
2. Include a request for specific information to improve volunteer safety such as local road/travel conditions and the need for volunteers to bring food or other personal items with them as well as any medical supplies they should bring when responding to a shelter.
3. Survey the MRC units to determine who has HAM radio capabilities, then establish a directory to be maintained by the State MRC Coordinator with a copy placed in the ESF-8 Procedures book at MEMA.
4. Conduct a contact drill with the HHAN to see if MRC coordinator contact details are up to date in the system.
5. Include information in Communications Protocols regarding assistance requests from emergency management and how these requests should be handled.
6. Conduct additional exercises in the Regions to ensure all MRC Coordinators are aware of the Communications Protocols and how it will work in an emergency

SECTION 4: CONCLUSION

Overall participants felt this exercise was very helpful and worthwhile. There was very good discussion among participants and many ideas both inside and outside the scope of this exercise were brought up and talked through. Given that this was the first test of these procedures, the exercise definitely appears to validate the procedures, while also allowing for some additional insight regarding some supplementary language that may be added to further strengthen them.

APPENDIX A: IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Table A.1 *Improvement Plan Matrix*

Capability	Observation Title	Recommendation	Corrective Action Description	Capability Element	Primary Responsible Agency	Agency POC	Start Date	Completion Date
Communications	Alert and Dispatch	Ensure the local community affected by the event is contacted first to establish their MRC availability prior to requesting volunteers from outside the local community.	Update the Communications Protocols to include contacting the local community that is affected by an event prior to outside volunteers being contacted	Planning	MDPH	State MRC Coordinator	July 5, 2010	Sept. 1, 2010
		Include a request for local road/travel conditions and the need for volunteers to bring food or other personal items with them as well as any medical supplies they should bring when responding to a shelter.	Update the Communications Protocols to incorporate safety information like road/travel conditions, food/personal needs to bring and any need medical supplies that volunteers need to bring with them	Planning	MDPH	State MRC Coordinator	July 5, 2010	Sept. 1, 2010
		Determine which MRC units have HAM radio capabilities and establish a directory	Survey MRC units for HAM radio capabilities and create a directory to be maintained by the State MRC	Planning	MDPH	State MRC Coordinator	July 5, 2010	Sept. 1, 2010

Massachusetts Department of Public Health
**MRC Communications Protocols
 Tabletop Exercise**

**After Action Report/Improvement Plan
 (AAR/IP)**

			Coordinator with a copy placed in the ESF-8 Procedures at MEMA					
		Conduct a HHAN drill for MRC Coordinators	Conduct HHAN drill for MRC Coordinators to ensure contact information is up to date and the Coordinators know how to use the system	Training and Exercises	MDPH	Exercise and Training Manager	July 5, 2010	Sept. 1, 2010
		Ensure that requests made from other agencies, such as Emergency Management are accounted for in the Protocols	Update the Communications Protocols to account for requests coming in from other agencies and how they should be handled.	Planning	MDPH	Statewide MRC Coordinator	July 5, 2020	Sept. 1, 2010
		Conduct additional exercises in the Regions	Conduct regional tabletops to further test the Communications Protocols and ensure all MRC units are familiar with it	Training and Exercises	MDPH	Exercise and Training Manager	July 5, 2010	On-going

APPENDIX B: 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/emergency preparedness audience.

Exercise Lessons Learned

A local MRC coordinator pointed out the value of providing transportation for volunteers to get to a shelter, especially when several volunteers from one unit are being activated. The value of this service for the volunteers would help increase participation, but would also keep additional vehicles off the road, which is especially helpful if there is a lot of debris. Local MRC units may not have the resources to provide transportation, so this may be a resource that needs to be provided by the state and coordinated through the ESF-1 desk.

A few participants expressed concern that mobilizing MRC units for deployments that cross their regular jurisdictions might be challenged by the lack of statutory protection from liability for MRC members. It was pointed out during the exercise that other liability protection is available to both clinicians and volunteers. No MRC volunteer has ever been sued in Massachusetts for negligence in performing their functions as an MRC member, and it is believed this is also true for the nation as a whole.

Some uncertainty was expressed about sheltering those with medical needs. DPH, ARC, MEMA, and other agencies are currently working on plans for coordinating medical shelters.

MRCs play a supporting role in sheltering, providing supplementary staffing to the agencies responsible for opening and maintaining shelters, generally the Emergency Management Directors at the local level. The communication protocol accounts for contacts made by EMDs requesting shelter staffing assistance through MEMA and the SEOC, which are forwarded to the ESF 8 desk which will recruit MRC members as needed and according to the protocol.

APPENDIX C: ACRONYMS

Table C.1: Acronyms

Acronym	Meaning
AAR/IP	After Action Report/Improvement Plan
BOH	Board of Health
ESF-8	Emergency Support Function-8 (Health and Medical)
FOUO	For Official Use Only
GNB	Greater New Bedford
HHAN	Health and Homeland Alert Network
HHS	Health and Human Services
MEMA	Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency
MEP	Master Exercise Practitioner
MRC	Medical Reserve Corps
TCL	Target Capabilities List
TTX	Tabletop Exercise