



KC RICE-SLICE '19

After-Action Report

FEMA Region VII



FEMA

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The exercises of the Kansas City and St. Louis Executive Boards are intended to build upon ongoing efforts to evaluate, test, and exercise the agencies continuity capabilities, including no-notice exercising and external evaluation of the Federal Community's continuity programs. The Continuity Exercise demonstrated the ability to activate an agency's Continuity of Operations (COOP) and evaluate continuity plans and reconstitution procedures. The purpose of the exercise was to test the Federal community's ability to activate, mobilize, and commence initial emergency Continuity of Operations under guidance outlined in the Federal Continuity Directive 1, federal statutes, Executive Orders, and Agency plans in response to a severe emergency that affects the Kansas City and Saint Louis metropolitan areas.

KC RICE-SLICE '19 focused on a New Madrid Seismic Zone 7.7 earthquake with cascading effects, which occurred July 23 at approximately 11:00 (CDT). The earthquake affected Federal, State, Local government facilities and private organizations across Kansas City and St Louis Metro areas. The incident degraded local response capability and severely degraded the Federal agencies capability to perform Essential Functions and Activities at the respective Primary Operating Facilities.

Overall, KC RICE/SLICE '19 successfully provided a learning environment that presented an opportunity for agencies to review their continuity plans and procedures, interact with other agencies, and reinforce the need for robust continuity planning, training, and exercises. This report will analyze the exercise results, identify strengths, and identify potential areas for further improvement.

Major Strengths

The major strengths of the KC RICE/SLICE '19 exercise are as follows:

Senior leadership was able to convene and make the decision to COOP to their alternate sites.

The accountability process was coordinated across the region for all personnel.

D/As identified no gaps in performing PMEFs at their alternate facilities.

Website helped with movement and ensured everyone had access to vital information.

Areas for Improvement

The evaluators identified the following opportunities for improvement:

There was a lack of ENS notification at the beginning of the exercise, which caused some confusion on the STARTEX.

D/As indicated that there needs to be more training conducted internally at alternate sites.

GENERAL ANALYSIS OF KC RICE-SLICE '19

As the agencies continue to enhance and mature their continuity programs and response and recovery capabilities, they also should continue to identify, document, and incorporate best practices and lessons learned.

During this exercise, various Department and Agencies (D/As) Evaluators and Controllers identified several strengths and areas for improvement. As Lessons Learned Advisors and other Continuous Improvement Program personnel work with the agencies to conduct root cause analysis, develop corrective actions, and build an Improvement Plan for this After-Action Report (AAR), they should consider whether these items are best practices or lessons learned to share across Region VII.

Objective 1: Utilize Activation Process and Trigger Decision Making Processes

Strengths

Strength 1: D/As activated COOP Plans based upon the recommendation from the COOP Manager to Senior Leadership. Senior leaders convened to aid leadership in making the decision to COOP to their alternate facilities or implement telework as necessary.

Strength 2: Leadership was fully engaged with the exercise and activated COOP based upon the incident and recommended actions. This allowed for great communication with employees, which aided in the successful completion of each objective.

Areas for Improvement

Area for Improvement 1: The lack of ENS notification confused participants, controllers, and evaluators on the initial start of the exercise. Members compensated by pushing out their own message to notify personnel of the COOP event. The FEB message went out to notify D/A's of the 7.7 magnitude earthquake.

Area for Improvement 2: Senior leaders needed assistance with roles & responsibilities during this phase.

Objective 2: Conduct COOP at Alternate Facilities and Work towards Reconstitution.

Strengths

Strength 1: D/As identified no gaps in conducting PMEFs at alternate facilities. All personnel knew where to go and what their role was in completing the PMEFs. They were able to test the interoperability of communications and IT systems.

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Strength 2: D/As have embraced the telework concept. It has supplemented and enhanced the capability to complete PMEFS. Telework has become a useful tool to assist Leadership when making decisions on COOP activation.

Areas for Improvement

Area for Improvement 1: D/As need to conduct training with both their primary and alternate ERG members. There were gaps in the knowledge that the alternates had and need to be addressed or conduct more training.

Area for Improvement 2: Some D/As indicated that there is a need for more training once they arrive at the COOP Site on setup. Once they were setup, they were able to perform the PMEFS.

Objective 3: Provide Situational Awareness to Organizational Stakeholders.

Strengths

Strength 1: D/As simulated providing operating status to other D/As based upon level of participation by D/As. This simulation allowed for the exercise to move forward.

Strength 2: D/As provided Situation Report to internal participants and employees. This kept everyone informed on what the status was of the COOP activation.

Objective 4: Conduct Accountability for the Impacted Area.

Strengths

Strength 1: D/As had no issues with the accountability process and were able to perform as required. Web-based tools supported the communication to ensure the exercise was on target.

Areas for Improvement

Area for Improvement: The D/As had no issues with accountability and coordinated effectively across the Region for all personnel.

Objective 5: Discuss/Initiate Operational Coordination Across Organizational Internal/External Stakeholders.

Strengths

Strength 1: Due to the limited number of D/As playing in the exercise, coordination across organizational internal/external stakeholders was simulated.

APPENDIX A: AGENCIES FEEDBACK

The responses captured in this section are from the Agencies in the Region VII KC RICE-SLICE '19 Exercise.

Kansas City

Agency Specific Objectives

A. General Observations

- The exercise afforded the D/As the ability to test our abilities to function under trying conditions while still executing our mission.
- In general, the exercise went well, and staff were able to perform MEFs without any difficulty while at their alternate or telework sites.
- All D/As received and responded to injects. The layout allowed some time with issues to give proper thought and implement the decision-making processes.
- The exercise went well and was received positively by all D/As.
- Some D/As indicated they need more training at their COOP Sites.

B. Exercise Structure and Flow

- With the exercise STARTEX the day prior, the discussions and convening of leadership culminated in the decision to activate the COOP Plan. This set the stage for the next day to arrival at the COOP facility to initiate the setup to be able to perform PMEFs.
- D/As like the realism of the exercise and the exercise products were well developed.

C. Preparation for the Exercise

- The preparation allowed for the D/As to ensure their organization and personnel were ready for the COOP Activation.
- The Controller/Evaluator training allowed personnel the skills and knowledge to ensure the exercise met the objectives.
- The documentation and MSEL provided the information to drive the scenario, which led to successful completion of the exercise.

D. Participation in the Exercise

- The D/As that participated indicated the exercise was a success; however, we had fewer people participating this year and want to encourage more participation in the future.

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- Many D/As developed specific injects to ensure their agency could fully meet the exercise objectives.

E. Strengths Observed

- The MSEL drove the major injects and they improved and added injects into the scenario.
- The exercise allowed for D/As to become familiar with their COOP Plan.
- Accountability was coordinated effectively across the region for all personnel.
- Situational awareness materials were readily accessible and disseminated.
- Alternate facilities were able to be utilized.

F. Weaknesses Observed

- Mixed coordination and engagement levels between agencies were not apparent due to the low number of D/As participating.
- Some D/As realized that they didn't have contact information readily available.

Conclusion

A. Exercise Takeaways

- The exercise was more beneficial this year than it has been in the past.
- D/As want to encourage more participation to include agencies outside of their organization.

B. COOP training or practice procedures

- This was a plausible scenario and allowed the D/As to implement their COOP Plans and transition to their COOP Facilities.
- The injects were well developed that allowed for the D/As to discuss options on addressing the situation.
- The exercise allowed most D/As to practice their relocation and telework procedures, to allow for a real COOP Activation in the future.

C. Additional Comments

- The exercise went great and leadership was fully engaged.

St. Louis

Agency Specific Objectives

A. General Observations

- The scenario was good, but need more information on effects to infrastructure such as airport operations, etc.
- D/As would like to get more personnel involved in the exercise.

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B. Exercise Structure and Flow

- The exercise had good flow.
- Observers will look to the future to grow to a full-scale exercise (FSE).

C. Preparation for the Exercise

- The exercise material provided were well developed and allowed for a successful implementation of D/As COOP Plans

D. Participation in the Exercise

- The exercise gave us the opportunity to demonstrate coordination of our resources and reinforced our plans for necessary communication and function.

E. Strengths Observed

- This allowed for open discussion for accomplishment and process improvements.
- Provided opportunity for COOP Manager to educate Senior Leadership on procedures
- Alternate facility was able to be discussed and utilized.
- Individuals were able to gain knowledge of plan.

F. Weaknesses Observed

- Status of infrastructure such as airport operations, etc.

Conclusion

A. Agencies Takeaways

- Encourage more D/As to participate to allow for better communication during a real-world event.

B. COOP training or Assistance Needed to Strengthen the Exercise

- Avoiding complex situations will allow for the exercise to flow as needed, to test procedures outlined in D/As COOP Plan

APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

A simpler evaluation form would be helpful to capture the data. The current form used was confusing and had to be filtered by agencies to capture the content from participants. The scenario was well-planned and realistic with one part of the region being hit with a large earthquake and responding to cascading impacts is plausible and lends realism to preparing for these types of events. Participation would have been better had the COOP exercise coincided with “Shaken Fury” vs. separating them out. This is based on the lack of participation from agencies leading up to the KC RICE/SLICE and the hot wash post-COOP event. Agencies concur with some of the new approaches outlined in the pre-COOP KC RICE/SLICE meeting and feel this could help agencies across the metro become more engaged. The suggestion from Continuity Working Group members was to change meetings from monthly to every other monthly and offer conference call as an option to attend and to change KC RICE/SLICE event to every other year vs. annually due to agency burnout and lack of recent participation.

APPENDIX C: EXERCISE PARTICIPANTS

KC RICE '19
Social Security Administration
Food and Drug Administration
USCIS NRC
Occupational Safety & Health Administration
ATSDR (CDC)

SLICE '19
General Service Administration
US Army Corps of Engineers
CBP

Number of Participants

- 8 agencies & organizations
- ~ 60 Participants
- ~ 20 alternate sites (including telework locations)

Of the 8 agencies that participated in KC RICE-SLICE '19, (65%) provided input to this AAR.

APPENDIX D: ACRONYMS

Acronym	Term
AAR	After-Action Report
COOP	Continuity of Operations
D/As	Department and Agencies
DHS	U.S. Department of Homeland Security
ENS	Emergency Notification System
ERG	Emergency Relocation Group
ERT	Emergency Response Team
HSPD	Homeland Security Presidential Directive
ICS	Incident Command System
IT	Information Technology
IM	Instant Message
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
GETS	Government Emergency Telecommunications System
GSA	General Services Administration
MEF	Mission Essential Functions
MSEL	Master Scenario Events List
OSHA	Occupational Safety and Health Administration
PMEF	Primary Mission Essential Functions
SimCell	Simulation Cell