

WARN TABLETOP EXERCISE LESSONS LEARNED

Sharing the Collective Wisdom

WARN TABLETOP EXERCISES

Water/Wastewater Agency Response Network (WARN) tabletop exercises (TTXs) are discussion-based exercises that bring WARN members together to address key issues and foster relationships between WARN members and other emergency responders. In 2006, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) began providing support to plan and facilitate tabletop exercises for WARNs across the United States.

The exercises are an opportunity for individual state WARN programs to evaluate their WARN agreement and test operational procedures. The fundamental goal of the training sessions is to enhance a WARN's capability to respond to any type of incident requiring specialized water and wastewater resources.



At the conclusion of each tabletop exercise, a facilitator leads a “hotwash” session, during which participants identify lessons learned to improve their respective WARN programs and response protocols.

KEY LESSONS LEARNED

Many of the tabletop exercises conducted since 2006 have identified similar lessons learned that can benefit any WARN program. Key lessons from the exercises are summarized below (not in priority order):

- **Develop and refine WARN operational plans** – The tabletop exercises allow WARN members to critically review and exercise operational plans. For WARNs without an operational plan, the exercise often illustrates the necessity of an operational plan which outlines WARN response protocols. Common improvements to enhance existing operational plans include better descriptions of roles and responsibilities, updating contact information, and revising forms. To complement the larger, more detailed operational plan, WARNs recognize the benefit of jobs aids such as a summary sheet of the operational plan as well as forms, checklists, and other support tools to use during a response. These job aids also help introduce new members to WARN protocols.
- **Strengthen the connection to the emergency management community** – WARNs recognize the benefit of promoting themselves within the local emergency management community in order to increase awareness, encourage recognition and support for the ongoing efforts of WARN programs,

“WARNs should make contact with each county director of Emergency Management to request a water/wastewater seat in the county EOC; WARNs should consider making a presentation to the annual state association conferences for city managers and police chiefs” - LaWARN TTX

recruit new members, and improve integration with the emergency services sector. After making contact with the local emergency management agency, it is essential that WARNs and emergency management continue to communicate – maintaining a strong working relationship is an ongoing effort.



- **Conduct training specific to the Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC)** – Although most WARN exercises focus on improving intrastate mutual aid procedures, there is sometimes a discussion of interstate mutual aid which may be beneficial for utilities that border another state, or during larger incidents. WARNs can integrate interstate mutual aid and assistance capabilities into their programs by having a better understanding of the EMAC process, which can be used to obtain resources from another state. Participating in EMAC training as well as working with local emergency management agencies to foster relationships with state EMAC Coordinators can help build interstate capabilities.

- **Continue Incident Command System (ICS) training** – Familiarity with ICS is a common lesson among the WARNs because use of ICS increases the ability of a WARN to fit into the local response structure and helps coordinate response activities with other groups.

“For a future WARN training or exercise we should include some hands-on training, completing some of the ICS forms needed for reimbursement” - OhWARN TTX

- **Implement accounting and documentation procedures** – WARNs acknowledge the importance of documenting activities and expenses associated with emergency response that may be eligible for reimbursement. Member utilities need to implement procedures to manage and document reimbursement expenses. Administrative personnel from utilities, including human resources, procurement, and general counsel, need to be actively involved in the development of their WARN programs, as they will provide support to operations personnel.

“Forms will be filled out in offices, not by operational personnel, and those people need to be trained according to these forms in the operational plan” - NCR WARN TTX

“The exercise demonstrated need for resource typing and documentation” - NDWARN TTX

- **Incorporate resource management and resource typing concepts** – Resource typing is a vital component of mutual aid/assistance. Exercise participants recognize the value of conducting training and exercises to help member utilities meet this National Incident Management System (NIMS) requirement and ensure that a utility in need receives the exact type of resources necessary to respond to an emergency.

- **Update member utilities’ emergency response plans** – WARN member utilities often identify the need to update their emergency response plans to include details about how and when to ask for mutual aid/assistance, the process and forms to use to request aid, and how best to integrate the incoming resources. Updating emergency response plans also provides the opportunity to inform all utility staff that their facility is a WARN member.

“I will go back and review the Operational Plan and review our Emergency Response Plan to tie it into my WARN” - NyWARN TTX

- **Conduct additional training and exercises** – To sustain an effective program, WARN members acknowledge the need to continue to develop and conduct training on the Operational Plan. As a WARN continues to mature, WARN members recommend conducting additional exercises of all types (discussion- and operations-based) in order to build on the results of the tabletop exercises and continue to foster relationships among participating organizations.

“It would be beneficial to have mock type exercises that duplicate an actual event” - OhWARN TTX

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

To learn more, please contact WSD-outreach@epa.gov. Additional information is also available at: <http://water.epa.gov/infrastructure/watersecurity/mutualaid/index.cfm>