

The TOPOFF 4 Exercise

“Top Officials 4” is the nation’s fourth major exercise in emergency preparedness. Using resources that Congress made available to prepare for acts of terrorism, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security sponsors the TOPOFF exercises as part of a thorough assessment of America’s ability to prevent, prepare for, respond to and recover from an attack that involves a weapon of mass destruction. Each TOPOFF exercise involves a two-year cycle of seminars, planning events, and exercises. The exercises enable federal, state and local agencies to identify ways to improve their ability to save lives and protect property when any major public emergency occurs, regardless of whether that emergency is natural or manmade.

TOPOFF 4 will involve more than 15,000 participants from federal, state, territorial, and local governments, as well as private-sector organizations and non-governmental organizations. In addition to Oregon, the state of Arizona and the U.S. Territory of Guam will participate. This is the first time a U.S. territory will take part in a TOPOFF exercise. Guam’s involvement will enable all participants to practice coordinated activities in prevention and response among the continental U.S. and a U.S. territory. Three international partners--Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom--will also conduct related exercises.

Oregon’s Participation in TOPOFF 4

From October 15-19, Oregon will test the ability of state and local governments to prevent, respond to and recover from an attack that uses a radiological dispersal device (RDD), commonly called a “dirty bomb.” Portland will host the exercise, which is one of the largest civilian exercises ever conducted. Three local governments will take part directly in the exercise, including the city of Portland, Multnomah County, and Columbia County, while at least three other county governments will be indirectly involved, including Washington County and Clackamas County in Oregon, and Clark County in Washington State.

This full-scale exercise will give state and local emergency management and response agencies the opportunity to test plans, procedures and equipment, while focusing on the following capabilities: evacuation/shelter-in-place, mass care, mass prophylaxis and communications. State and local participants will also benefit from close interaction with the federal government, voluntary organizations, international partners and the private sector.

The exercise will address issues in public policy and strategy, including mobilization of systems that prevent disasters, as well as those that respond to disasters when they occur. The exercise will require participants to make difficult decisions and carry out essential functions. It will challenge their ability to maintain a common, coordinated response to an incident of national significance.

Agencies and organizations will deploy staff into the field, just as they would in a real-world situation. They will face realistic challenges that relate specifically to the incident at hand, including allocation of limited resources and effective management in changing conditions. Planning and preparation for the exercise will help strengthen working relationships among departments and agencies at every level of government toward preventing such emergencies and responding to them effectively if they should ever occur.

Oregon’s Objectives in TOPOFF 4

All agencies, states, territories, and local entities who participate in TOPOFF 4 will strive to meet the overarching objectives of the exercise. But they will also strive to achieve their own individual objectives. The following are the primary objectives for the state of Oregon and the Portland Urban Area (including Clark County, Washington):

- Emergency Operations Plans: Validate state and local emergency operations plans, including the specific annexes that deal with radiological/hazardous material events, public information systems, public health and the ability to deal with an event that overwhelms the capabilities of local and state governments.
 - Do we facilitate an environment where everyone works well together?
 - Do our state and local agencies do what they are supposed to?
- Timely Intergovernmental Coordination: Demonstrate the ability to request federal resources in a timely and efficient manner, and incorporate those resources into local and state response. Make effective use of the National Incident Management System (NIMS), which is an organizational response to large scale incidents. NIMS gives local, state and federal responders a structured system that is familiar to all three levels of government.
 - Do we establish and maintain the integrity of the NIMS structure from start to finish, or does it break down?
 - Do we succeed in maintaining a collaborative flow of communications?
- Intelligence Management: Manage intelligence information through existing law enforcement systems.
 - Do we establish and maintain a joint information system?
- Effectiveness: Assess the effectiveness of plans, policies, procedures, and annexes to handle and treat the mental health issues of first responders and the public caused by a terrorist incident.
 - Have we succeeded in supporting the national objective in dealing successfully with mental health issues?
- Recovery: Address the long-term effects of the emergency, including economic recovery, public health concerns, land use, displaced populations, disruption of transportation systems, etc.
- Lessons Learned: Based on lessons learned, revise and update Operational Plans for future response to events.

The Scenario

The T4 full-scale exercise is based on National Planning Scenario 11 (NPS-11). Terrorists have planned attacks in Oregon, Arizona, and the U.S. Territory of Guam. They have brought radioactive material into the United States. The first of three coordinated attacks occurs in Guam, with the detonation of a Radiological Dispersal Device (RDD), or “dirty bomb,” causing

casualties and widespread contamination in a populous area. Within hours, similar attacks occur in Portland and Phoenix.

An RDD is not the same as a nuclear attack. Rather, it is a conventional explosive that releases radioactive material into the surrounding area. Although it does not cause the type of catastrophic damage associated with a nuclear detonation, an RDD causes severe problems in rescuing victims, providing emergency care, and managing long-term decontamination.

Challenging the Entire Homeland Security System

Exercises such as TOPOFF are an important component of national preparedness. These exercises help build an integrated capability to prevent terrorist attacks and respond to disasters of other kinds, making use of resources at every level, including federal, state, territorial, local, and the private sector. Equally important, the exercises help agencies prepare to recover from disasters that actually occur, regardless of whether they are manmade or natural.

The full-scale exercise offers agencies and jurisdictions a way to test their plans and skills in a real-time, realistic environment, and to gain the in-depth knowledge that only experience can provide. Participants will exercise prevention and intelligence-gathering functions, which are critical to preventing terrorist attacks. Lessons learned from the exercise will provide valuable insights to guide future planning for securing the nation against terrorist attacks, disasters, and other emergencies.

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