

Frequently Asked Questions



Homeland Security

1. What is the TOPOFF Exercise Series?

“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 and manmade.

2. What is TOPOFF 4?

Like the previous exercises, TOPOFF 4 involves top officials at every level of government, as well as representatives from the international community and private sector. The exercise will take place from October 15–19. Because it is a “Full-Scale Exercise,” TOPOFF 4 will involve thousands of federal, state, territorial, and local officials. Government agencies at every level will mount a full-scale simulated response to an urgent threat that presents a variety of complex challenges.

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.

3. Where will the TOPOFF 4 Full-Scale Exercise take place? How were the venues selected?

The states of Arizona and Oregon, the United States Territory of Guam, as well as three international partners—Canada, Australia and the United Kingdom—will join the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and other federal agencies in this important effort. Simulated radiological incidents will occur in Phoenix, Portland, and Guam, upon which the territorial government of Guam and the state of Oregon will conduct full-scale exercises with their affected local governments. Arizona officials will participate in a functional exercise. Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom will not have separate functional or full-scale exercises. However, with the coordination of the U.S. Department of State, they will be responding to the crisis occurring in Guam, Portland, and Phoenix.

In order to be selected as a venue, states request participation in the exercise to support national exercise goals and enhance their own preparedness. Typically, two states are selected for each TOPOFF cycle. For the first time in the TOPOFF series, a U.S. territory will take part in the exercise this year.

4. What is the difference between a functional and a full-scale exercise (FSE)?

A functional exercise focuses on coordination of decision-making and communications during a simulated disaster. It is a functional assessment of planning and decision-making in a time of crisis that engages multiple agencies in policy decisions and communications over several days.

A full-scale exercise adds on-the-ground first-response activities to test participants on a wide range of capabilities and task areas, including incident response, incident command, cross-jurisdictional coordination, risk communication, and implementation of protocols and policies. Participants in both full-scale and functional exercises also test prevention and the intelligence-gathering functions, which are critical to preventing terrorist attacks.

Oregon will conduct a full-scale exercise.

5. How many agencies will participate in Oregon? How many individual participants will be involved?

As of August, Oregon's list of participants includes at least 11 state departments and numerous smaller agencies, as well as city and county agencies in the Portland metropolitan area. While all state agencies may not participate directly in the exercise, many will test their internal procedures for responding to large-scale public emergencies. One state commission will participate (the Public Utility Commission). 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.

6. Who participates in TOPOFF training? What top officials from Oregon will participate?

The exercise engages participants at all levels of government, including national cabinet members, governors, mayors, city managers, local fire departments, EMS, police, search-and-rescue personnel, public health agencies, public communications, and members of the private sector.

TOPOFF 4 will enable top officials and relevant personnel to practice many courses of action to cope with a major disaster. It will also enable them to gain and maintain situational awareness while deploying appropriate resources. Top federal officials, state governors, county executives, mayors, and city managers, along with local and territorial personnel, will play key roles throughout the exercise.

Top officials from Oregon will include Governor Ted Kulongoski and key members of his staff, Portland Mayor Tom Potter, Multnomah County Board of Commissioners Chair Ted Wheeler, and senior executives from participating jurisdictions. Many private sector organizations will join the exercise.

7. How much will TOPOFF 4 cost? How much will Oregon contribute to overall costs?

The Portland Urban Area has received about \$2.5 million in federal grant funds to support TOPOFF 4. Of this,

city government has earmarked approximately \$1.9 million for city-level participation. Clackamas, Washington, Columbia, and Clark Counties will received \$100,000 each, and Multnomah County will receive approximately \$200,000.

The state of Oregon will use a grant from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to pay exercise-related costs. The grant will pay for up to \$700,000 in costs associated with TOPOFF 4. In addition, many state agencies will absorb the cost of participation as part of their ongoing statutory responsibilities for the state's emergency services system. The Department of Homeland Security will also contribute funding toward planning and federal-level participation in the exercise.

The total cost of conducting TOPOFF 4 will not be available until the final report and evaluation are complete for this exercise. Even so, the final report will not account for costs absorbed by state agencies as part of their statutory responsibilities.

8. What are the national objectives of TOPOFF 4?

TOPOFF 4 seeks to accomplish major objectives in five important areas:

- **Prevention:** Test the handling and flow of operational and time-critical intelligence between agencies to prevent a terrorist incident.
- **Incident management:** Test the full range of existing procedures for domestic incident management of a WMD terrorist event and improve top officials' (federal/state/local) capabilities to respond in partnership in accordance with the NRP and NIMS.
- **Intelligence/Investigation:** Test the handling and flow of operational and time-critical intelligence between agencies prior to and in response to a linked terrorist incident.
- **Public Information:** Practice the strategic coordination of media relations and public information issues in the context of a WMD terrorist incident or incident of national significance.
- **Evaluation:** Identify lessons learned and promote best practices.

9. What are the objectives in Oregon for 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?
- **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?
- **Address the long-term effects of the emergency, including economic recovery, public health concerns, land use, displaced populations, disruption of transportation systems, etc.**
- **Based on lessons learned, revise and update Operational Plans for future response to events.**

10. How is the private sector in Oregon involved in T4?

In an emergency, government often relies on the support of the private sector. Relationships and collaboration with utilities and other private sector resource providers are essential.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security works through its Private Sector Office and Office of Infrastructure Protection to involve the private sector in the TOPOFF exercise cycle of events. TOPOFF 3 involved more than 5,000 members of the private sector participating at various levels.

11. What is the scenario for the TOPOFF 4 FSE?

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.

12. How relevant is the TOPOFF 4 scenario to the war on terrorism?

TOPOFF 4 planners have based the scenario on research of actual terrorist organizations' capabilities and news accounts of real events since September 11, 2001. The scenario is plausible, but purely fictional. It is not based on specific military or government intelligence. TOPOFF planners do not intend the exercise to be a forecast of future terrorist activities. The scenario contains some artificiality to ensure conformance with agencies' and jurisdictions' training objectives.

13. Will the exercise utilize real weapons?

The exercise will not utilize real weapons in the scenario. The response, however, will occur as if the weapons were real.

14. How is TOPOFF different from other exercises that have been held in Oregon?

Oregon jurisdictions regularly plan for and participate in statewide, regional and national exercises to practice and evaluate emergency preparedness, response and recovery capabilities. However, these exercises tend to be directed toward operational activities. TOPOFF, by definition, is a "Top Officials" exercise that seeks to engage executive decision-makers at all levels of government and private sector in the strategic management of a terrorist incident.

15. What does it mean to "play" in the exercise? How is exercise play prompted and regulated?

"Play" describes how agencies and organizations act out their roles in response to the scenario. Players receive information by exercise controllers, based on a Master Scenario Event List. The list contains key events that trigger decisions and activities that exercise specific capabilities and achieve the exercise objectives.

16. What is gained from TOPOFF training? What does Oregon hope to gain?

Top officials from all levels of government gain valuable knowledge and experience dealing with complex issues related to terrorism prevention, disaster preparedness, response, and recovery. The exercise offers participants a mechanism to test plans and skills in a real-time, realistic environment, and to gain the in-depth learning that only experience can provide. Training activities are based on the objectives of participating departments and agencies.

Several of the overarching objectives of TOPOFF 4 pertain directly to the assignment of roles and responsibilities, and the coordination of communications and operations. By exercising these objectives, participants can improve their overall ability to respond to major disasters, regardless of whether they are natural or manmade.

TOPOFF 4 also provides an opportunity to integrate and conform to Homeland Security Presidential Directive – 8 (HSPD-8), the National Preparedness Goal and the National Exercise Program. The Department of Homeland Security will introduce the five-year National Exercise Program plan during the TOPOFF 4 exercise cycle. This program combines exercise activities and affords departments and agencies the opportunity to reduce the number of separate exercises they must plan and participate in. More importantly, the program provides an opportunity to demonstrate that the government can operate effectively during an elevated threat situation.

This exercise will give state and local emergency 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 test exercise objectives and modify their response procedures based on best practices and lessons learned from TOPOFF 4.

17. How will participation in TOPOFF 4 affect Oregon’s preparedness?

The exercise will enable state and local agencies to identify and correct deficiencies in communications, equipment, interagency cooperation and procedures needed to handle emergencies of all kinds, including terrorist attacks and natural disasters, such as killer storms, earthquakes and fires, as well as failures of critical infrastructure (e.g., the collapse of a bridge).

The exercise will enable state and local governments to plan improvements in their respective capabilities in emergency response.

18. Is the exercise open to outside observation?

Because of the sensitive nature of the capabilities being exercised, TOPOFF 4 officials will carefully manage external observation and information dissemination. Some international, federal, state, territorial, and local officials and emergency response personnel will receive invitations to observe a portion of the exercise, which will help them understand how the nation is preparing to address terrorist threats and other kinds of public emergencies. Members of the news media may attend briefings during and after the exercise. Some law enforcement and intelligence components of the exercise are classified and will not be discussed in detail.

19. What happens if a real terrorist attack or a natural disaster occurs while the exercise is under way?

The exercise will immediately halt. No essential personnel will be diverted from any actual emergency response, and neither will the exercise affect any ongoing operation in preparedness or security.

20. What information will the public receive about exercise outcomes and lessons learned?

A formal evaluation of the exercise will occur at its conclusion. Agencies will apply the findings and lessons learned to ongoing efforts to improve national preparedness and security. Because of the need to maintain operational security and protect sensitive information about efforts to thwart terrorist activities, information released to the public must receive careful scrutiny. The Department of Homeland Security and its partner agencies will make every effort to inform and reassure the public without actually releasing information that could help terrorists or other criminals.

21. How will members of the public become aware of exercise activities and possible disruption of their normal activities?

The public will not likely experience much disruption as a result of the TOPOFF 4 exercise. Discussions are under way, however, concerning noise in the main area of exercise “play,” and procedures to notify surrounding neighborhoods and businesses in advance of the exercise. In the days leading up to the event, state and city

agencies will work with the news media to inform citizens about the exercise and let the public know what to expect.

22. Who can I contact at the Department of Homeland Security for additional information?

Please contact Ms. Marlene Phillips if you have additional questions. Ms. Phillips can be reached at marlene.phillips@dhs.gov or (202) 786-9604. Or, you can call the FEMA News Desk at (202) 646-4600.

23. Who can I contact in Oregon for additional information?

In Oregon, news media may direct questions to:

- Kerry Dugan, Portland Office of Emergency Management / Tel. 503.823.2360
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