

Nebraska Schools Bus Accident: Tabletop Exercise

Situation Manual

This Situation Manual (SitMan) provides exercise participants with all the necessary tools for their roles in the exercise. Some exercise material is intended for the exclusive use of exercise planners, facilitators, and evaluators, but players may view other materials that are necessary to their performance. All exercise participants may view the SitMan.

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Exercise Overview

Exercise Name	Nebraska Schools Bus Accident Exercise
Exercise Dates	
Scope	This exercise is a workshop planned for 1.5 hours. Exercise play will include facilitated participant discussion.
Mission Area(s)	Response; Recovery; Standard Reunification Method
Core Capabilities	Standard Reunification Method (SRM) Operational Coordination Operational Communication Public Information and Warning Critical Transportation Access Control and Identity Verification
Objectives	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Test coordination of school resources and collaboration among care providers post-incident.2. Identify strategies and a process for standard reunification method post-incident.3. Ensure capacity for accurate and timely communication in support of operations and reunification among and between team members on- and off-site and first responders.4. Communicate details of the accident and reunification procedures with the parents of the students involved.5. Test plans for transporting students from the accident site to the reunification site; consider objectives for reunifying students in multiple hospital locations.6. Assess abilities to conduct SRM; identify parents, reunify them with their students, and keep records as planned.
Threat or Hazard	Bus Accident

Exercise Name	Nebraska Schools Bus Accident Exercise
Scenario	There are two scenarios. In scenario one, a school bus carrying student-athletes, coaches, and the driver has been in an accident in which the bus overturned in a ditch. There are injuries but no fatalities. Schools will have to decide on the reunification of students and collaboration with other facilities. In scenario two, there are multiple life-threatening injuries, and students are dispersed in multiple locations prior to reunification with parents.
Sponsor	Nebraska Department of Education; University of Nebraska Public Policy Center
Participating Organizations	Nebraska Department of Education; University of Nebraska Public Policy Center; local Nebraska Educational Service Units (ESUs); local Nebraska school officials/staff/faculty
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General Information

Exercise Objectives and Core Capabilities

The following exercise objectives in Table 1 describe the expected outcomes for the exercise. The objectives are linked to core capabilities, which are distinct critical elements necessary to achieve the specific mission area(s). The objectives and aligned core capabilities are guided by elected and appointed officials and selected by the Exercise Planning Team.

Exercise Objectives	Core Capability
Test coordination of school resources and collaboration among care providers post-incident.	Operational Coordination
Identify strategies and a process for standard reunification method post-incident.	Standard Reunification Method (SRM)
Ensure capacity for accurate and timely communication in support of operations and reunification among and between team members on and off-site as well as first responders.	Operational Communication
Clearly communicate details of the accident and reunification procedures with the parents of the students involved.	Public Information and Warning
Test plans for transporting students from the accident site to the reunification site; consider plans for reunifying students in multiple hospital locations.	Critical Transportation
Assess abilities to conduct SRM; identify parents, reunify them with their students, and keep records as planned.	Access Control and Identity Verification

Table 1. Exercise Objectives and Associated Core Capabilities

Participant Roles and Responsibilities

The term *participant* encompasses many groups of people, not just those playing in the exercise. Groups of participants involved in the exercise, and their respective roles and responsibilities, are as follows:

- **Players:** Players are personnel who have an active role in discussing or performing their regular roles and responsibilities during the exercise. Players discuss or initiate actions in response to the simulated emergency.
- **Observers:** Observers do not directly participate in the exercise. However, they may support the development of player responses to the situation during the discussion by asking relevant questions or providing subject matter expertise.

- **Facilitators:** Facilitators provide situation updates and moderate discussions. They also provide additional information or resolve questions as required. Key Exercise Planning Team members also may assist with facilitation as subject matter experts (SMEs) during the exercise.
- **Evaluators:** Evaluators are assigned to observe and document certain objectives during the exercise. Their primary role is to document player discussions, including how and if those discussions conform to plans, policies, and procedures.

Exercise Structure

This exercise will be a multimedia, facilitated activity conducted through a web-based platform (Zoom). Players will participate in the following scenarios:

- Scenario 1: School bus accident outside of town
- Scenario 2: School bus accident outside of town but with multiple severe injuries and students dispersed to area hospitals for treatment

Participants review the situation and engage in group discussions. After these discussions, participants will engage in a moderated plenary discussion in which a spokesperson from each group will present a synopsis of the group's actions based on the scenario.

Exercise Guidelines

- This exercise will be held in an open, low-stress, no-fault environment. Varying viewpoints, even disagreements, are expected.
- Respond to the scenario using your knowledge of current plans and capabilities (i.e., you may use only existing assets) and insights derived from your training.
- Decisions are not precedent-setting and may not reflect your organization's final position on a given issue. This exercise is an opportunity to discuss and present multiple options and possible solutions.
- Issue identification is not as valuable as suggestions and recommended actions that could improve response and recovery efforts. Problem-solving efforts should be the focus.

Exercise Assumptions and Artificialities

In any exercise, assumptions and artificialities may be necessary to complete play in the time allotted or account for logistical limitations. Exercise participants should accept that assumptions and artificialities are inherent in any exercise and should not allow these considerations to impact their participation negatively.

- The exercise is conducted in a no-fault learning environment wherein capabilities, plans, systems, and processes will be evaluated.
- The exercise scenario is plausible, and events occur as they are presented.
- All players receive information at the same time.

Exercise Evaluation

Evaluation of the exercise is based on the exercise objectives and aligned capabilities, capability targets, and critical tasks, which are documented in Exercise Evaluation Guides (EEGs).

Evaluators have EEGs for each of their assigned areas. Additionally, players will be asked to complete participant feedback forms. These documents, coupled with facilitator observations and notes, will be used to evaluate the exercise and compile the After-Action Report (AAR).

Scenario 1: Bus Accident

Students and staff of the school's boys and girls basketball teams are on their way home from district playoffs. It is late evening in February, and there has been light snow all day, and bridges have been icing up. Fifteen miles away from town, the bus encounters one of these icy bridges. The driver loses control, and the bus slides off of the road into the ditch and overturns. The school bus transports 25 students and five coaches, who are school staff, and the bus driver.

There are serious injuries but no fatalities. Emergency crews are starting to show up at the scene. The driver is injured and unconscious. The boy's head coach, who also serves as the Assistant Principal, has been rendered unconscious. The school superintendent receives text messages and phone calls from those on the bus and parents following the teams. First responders are asking about a location to send non-injury students.

Key Issues

- Coordination
- Communication
- Reunification

Questions

1. Standard Reunification Method (SRM) calls for establishing an impacted site team and a reunification site team. Given the scenario, how would these teams be selected? Who would serve on the teams? What does the coordination look like with local hospitals?
2. Where would you establish a reunification site, and what procedures would you implement for student reunification?
3. Consider communications. What are the notification procedures for the school when an accident occurs involving a school vehicle? How are parents notified of the incident and the procedure for picking up their children?

Scenario 2: Bus Accident with Students Dispersed to Multiple Locations

Scenario 2 focuses on a more complex reunification effort because students will become dispersed over several communities.

Fifteen miles away from town, the bus encounters an icy bridge. The driver loses control, and the bus slides off of the road into the ditch and overturns. The school bus carries 25 students, five coaches who are school staff members, and the bus driver. There are numerous life-threatening injuries but no fatalities.

The local hospital's ER is at capacity with three cases (one bus driver and two students), and a life-flight helicopter is routing two of the injured (the boy's head coach/assistant principal and a student) to a major metropolitan hospital. Two ambulances from neighboring communities carry two injured students to different hospitals for medical treatment. Parents begin to arrive on the scene, many of whom attended the game and were following the buses home. Many of these parents have found their children, who were not seriously injured, and want to take them home.

Key Issues

- Multi-Agency Coordination Across Communities
- Reunification
- Communication

Questions

1. Given that some students remain on-site and others have been taken to multiple hospital locations, how do you establish a reunification site? What is your reunification procedure for an event with students in numerous locations?
2. How is the EOP implemented during games and other extra-curricular activities away from school? How is the chain of custody maintained when students are in multiple locations and parents are at the incident site?
3. How are parents notified of the incident and the procedure for picking up their children? Are parents at the incident site allowed to take their children home?