

Red Cross Shelter Simulation Exercise Review
St. Augustine Shelter Team March 14, 2009

Simulation Exercise Summary:

The objective of the Red Cross exercise was to observe and evaluate a shelter team's ability to set up a shelter in an unfamiliar facility. Identify what problems a shelter team would encounter and how they solved these problems. Involve exercise participants in the simulation exercise. When the exercise started, the Red Cross notified the St. Augustine shelter team that the scenario made their shelter unusable and to move its shelter operation to Beulah United Methodist Church. Only the shelter team leader and shelter manager were aware that the team would be tasked to change its shelter location.

Bottom line: The St. Augustine shelter team successfully moved its shelter operation to Beulah UMC, performing the expected tasks for registration, dormitory, food service, disaster health, disaster mental health, logistics, communications, information, volunteer coordination, shelter operation center and shelter manager. It performed the inspection and sign-over of the facility, received and distributed Red Cross supplies and equipment (24 cots and hand-held radios) and food (water, snacks and the lunch meal). It accounted for its team members, exercise participants and Red Cross trainers and observers. It maintained communications with the Red Cross Emergency Operations Center using the HAM radio operator provided by the Red Cross, as phone service was suspended for the exercise. The shelter team's shelter operation center maintained shelter status throughout the exercise, and reported the shelter status to the EOC. The shelter team fed the lunch meal to all the exercise participants on time at 12:00 noon, and conducted a shelter resident meeting, shelter team meeting and post exercise review. Exercise participants were involved in shelter operations throughout the duration of the exercise.

St. Augustine shelter team exercise objectives:

- Successfully open, operate and close its emergency shelter.
- Shelter team members operate assigned shelter areas during the exercise; brief the exercise participants on their assigned shelter area; react to exercise injects from the Red Cross; maintain communications and shelter awareness; and perform information reporting for their area.
- Assign exercise participants to teams; introduce participants to all areas of shelter operations. Rotate the teams through three groupings of shelter areas. Shelter team members brief the exercise participants on their assigned shelter area; react to exercise injects from the Red Cross.
- All shelter areas maintain shelter situation awareness and status; shelter areas report status to the shelter operations center; shelter operations center maintain and report shelter status to the Red Cross EOC. Prepare final shelter report for the exercise.

Shelter team exercise objectives achieved:

- Successfully opened, operated and closed the emergency shelter at Beulah UMC. However, the majority of the time at Beulah UMC was devoted to shelter setup.
- Shelter team members operated their assigned shelter areas during the exercise. They involved the participant teams in their shelter area.
- The shelter team maintained shelter situation awareness and status; shelter areas reported status to the shelter operations center; shelter operations center maintained shelter status and reported shelter status to the Red Cross EOC.

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- Overall, this was an excellent test of the shelter team's flexibility and ability to adapt to changing situations in support of our community.

Shelter team exercise objectives not achieved:

- Introduce exercise participants to all areas of shelter operations. Rotate the participant teams through three groupings of shelter areas. Participants were assigned to teams, but the rotation to different shelter areas did not occur.
- Follow the exercise training plan for exercise participants. Participants were assigned to teams, but the training schedule was not followed, due to the time involved in set up at Beulah UMC. The participant teams were employed performing setup tasks.

Simulation exercise lessons learned:

Initial shelter team meeting: The Red Cross trainers notified the shelter team of the requirement to move its shelter to Beulah UMC.

- Initial shelter team actions: The shelter team leader formed an advanced party composed of the shelter manager, operations center and logistics members, with the tasks to inspect and sign-for the Beulah UMC facility and determine the shelter layout plan.
- Problem: There was a lag time of 30-45 minutes where the main party remained at St. Augustine and did not know when to move to Beulah UMC. The leads for registration, food service, dormitory, information, disaster health and disaster mental health needed this time to set up their areas at Beulah UMC.
- Lessons learned:
 - Establish communications guidelines for the advanced party: what communications means (cell phone, hand-held radio), when to call, what information to pass; establish a time-line for completing the initial shelter assessment.
 - Include the following area leads or representatives: shelter manager, operations, logistics, registration, food service, dormitory, information and disaster health; they need to participate in the decision making in determining the shelter layout and have the time to make the initial setup of their area before the arrival of the main party.
 - The advanced party did an excellent job in determining the shelter layout of the Beulah UMC facility.
- The Red Cross instructors and the shelter team leader provided an overview of the exercise to the shelter team and exercise participants. The participants were assigned to two groups for rotation through the shelter areas during the exercise, based on the training plan. The shelter team leader briefed the participants on the St. Augustine shelter layout in preparation for the move to Beulah UMC.
 - Problem: The training plan for the participant group was not followed, due to the time needed to set up the shelter at Beulah UMC.
 - Participant groups were assigned to support the setup of the various shelter areas, help off-load Red Cross equipment and food, and setup cots. They did get the opportunity to be involved in the setup and take-down of the shelter.

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Arrival of the main party of the shelter team at the Beulah UMC facility:

- Initial impressions: there was a lot of activity on-going that gave the appearance of disorder. It was like a perfect storm: the shelter areas had been identified, but the area leads (having been delayed in arrival) were moving tables and chairs to setup their areas; registration was getting under way; the Red Cross supply truck had arrived with 24 cots delivered, and food for 50 people to be off-loaded.
 - Problem: Red Cross observers or trainers were providing recommendations on what to do to some of the shelter team members, adding to the confusion (example: suggesting that women and men should be in separate rooms, which was not checked with the dormitory manager, who had not yet arrived; she had to correct this later).
- In actuality, each shelter area was under control by the advanced party (shelter manager, operations and logistics) and working to set up. When the activity died down (24 cots assembled, food off-loaded, tables and chairs in their proper rooms), it was apparent that each shelter area was functioning normally.

Lessons learned by shelter area:

Registration:

- Needs to be included in the advanced party to adequately prepare for registration. Deploy with the registration kit.
- Add 6 volunteers to registration to handle the initial surge
 - Lesson learned: add 12 or more clip boards to the shelter kit. Like DMV, hand out to residents with registration forms. Speeds up the registration process; enables control and use of space.
 - Assign registration sequence numbers to each resident when they arrive. Provide on a slip of paper with the clipboard and registration form (post to the top of the form). This would provide a guide to the number of families being registered, and identify if a family is having trouble completing the form (when accounting for the form numbers that have been issued).
 - Make Q-cards in Spanish with key translations: Kim, Claudia, Sue and Olivia work on this; pass results to Dan and Paul for documentation.
- Translate new registration forms into Spanish. Create same form: English one side/Spanish other side.
- Recommends doing away with shelter operations form with family name, # in family, special needs, staying over night. Registration will still provide this information to shelter operations.
- Modify report form for shelter operations to add # expected to stay over night.

Disaster Health Services:

- Needs to be included with the advanced party to determine site layout for medical services: need to consider privacy for treatment area. This was not available, initially.
- Needs communications: hand-held radio for contacting shelter operations center; needs access to phone for calling patient-related information.
- Lacked guidance for handing-off Red Cross patient information forms. Turn-in all forms to shelter operations center.

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- Lesson learned: Need large envelopes to hold resident medical forms for shipment to the Red Cross when the shelter closes.

Disaster Mental Health Services:

- Co-locating with Disaster Health Services provided a number of advantages:
 - Helped Disaster Health Services with triage of residents with medical problems.
 - Both can share communications (hand –held radio/phone) and privacy space.
 - Proximity of Disaster Health Services provides additional support if residents have unsettled behavior.
 - Lesson learned: change shelter diagram to locate Disaster Health and Disaster Mental Health in classroom 10/11. It has phone and data hookups for communications. The room divider enables separate operations. Continue to use the nurse station room during registration and as needed during shelter operations.
- Need name tag that identifies professional level (nurse, social worker, other training, etc).

Dormitory:

- Include dormitory with advanced party to organize the dormitory space. The Beulah UMC layout precluded a large space, so smaller rooms became the initial plan. Confusion occurred when the Red Cross suggested that the men and women be located in separate rooms. This is counter to the focus on maintaining family units. This was corrected later, but had been implemented before the arrival of the dormitory lead.
- Cot assignment: names from registration were placed on cots to reserve them. This helped maintain family integrity in cot placement.

Food service:

- Food service received the headcount estimate from shelter operations (50), which was based on registration confirming with participants who would be staying for lunch. Some had to depart before 12:00 PM.
 - Lesson learned: Although the team did not have to cook or prepare the meal, it had to note the contents of the meal provided by the Red Cross. Upon inspection, it was noted that some of the sandwiches contained meat that needed to be refrigerated before serving due to the arrival at 10:00 AM and the scheduled feeding time at 12:00 PM. There was adequate refrigeration space. The feeding team placed the sandwiches in the refrigerator until serving time.
 - The feeding team also transported the coffee and snacks from St. Augustine to the Beulah UMC facility.

Logistics:

- Need to add 2 rolls of yellow marking tape to the shelter kit to mark off no entry areas.
- The Red Cross delivery truck with cots and food was already at the Beulah UMC facility when the advanced party arrived.
- Need to add a tape measure to our Supply Kit so we can provide the 40 Square Feet of living space as required by Red Cross Shelter Guidance. It isn't required at Saint Augustine's where we can count 12" squares on the floor, but may be required in the event that our operation is moved to another facility.

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- The advanced party needs guidance on when to send the main body of the shelter team and residents. Better to have them sooner than later; identify a room to hold residents until registration is complete.
 - Lesson learned: Red Cross advised that using a dormitory or other room for a holding area could have accommodated the residents waiting registration, and then converted the space later. Add this guidance to the tasks for shelter layout determination.
- Logistics has a lot of information to pass on to the next shift, and shift change may not be by the group.
 - Lesson learned: each area lead needs to keep its information organized for passing on to the next shift (incidents that occurred, forms completed, supplies requested and due in and for what purpose). Shift hand-off will be critical for shelter operations. This needs to be practiced to develop training.

Information:

- Include information lead (with sign kit) in the advanced party, as this area posts shelter signs to the shelter areas. Determine the shelter areas and then post the signs to preclude confusion upon the arrival of the main body.
 - Problem: the advanced party posted makeshift signs denoting shelter area locations. The Red Cross advised that make-shift signs should be used instead of the signs from the shelter sign kit. This was probably intended for the parking lot signs, but was interpreted as all signs.
 - Lesson learned: The make-shift signs were difficult to read. The bilingual signs from the shelter kit were not used until later. They should have been posted by the advanced party. Post the make-shift signs first, so that Information can follow with the appropriate shelter team sign.

Communications:

The Red Cross terminated all phone communications for the duration of the exercise. The Red Cross provided a HAM radio operator at the Beulah UMC site. This was the only mode of communication outside of the shelter. The shelter team assigned its communications lead to coordinate communications between the shelter team and the HAM radio operator. Shelter operations fed messages to and from the Red Cross EOC using this coordination.

- Hand-held radio allocation:
 - Shelter team radios: 6 radios were procured by the parish and issued to shelter team members. The Disaster Health members needed a hand –held radio.
 - Purpose: internal communications with team leads and shelter operations
 - Lesson learned:
 - Prioritize the allocation of radios: shelter operations, shelter manager, registration, disaster health, logistics
 - Plan for the recharging of the radios to support multiple shifts.
 - Red Cross hand-held radios: (Purpose: external communications to EOC)
 - If one: shelter operations
 - If two: shelter operations and shelter manager:

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Volunteer coordination:

- Modify the Volunteer Sign-in log form.
 - Communications/operations coordinate with Volunteer Coordination to add equipment to the volunteer form for the persons issued Red Cross and shelter team equipment (e.g., Red Cross and shelter team hand-held radios, air mattress for remaining overnight).
 - Make the equipment column wider to accommodate the items issued: name tag, Red Cross radio, shelter radio, air mattress.
 - Add email address to the phone column for ease of contact.
 - Add page number to Volunteer Sign-in log to help keep track of the forms used.
- Make a shift information board with acetate cover that lists all the shelter area leads and contact information.
- Make a 3-day Shelter Shift schedule board with acetate cover to maintain shift information.

Shelter operations center:

The key enabler to successful shelter operations; center for communications from/to the Red Cross; center of communications within the shelter team; maintains shelter information status for all shelter areas; and member of the advanced party to reconnoiter the new shelter site and determine the shelter layout.

- Maintained shelter report status board throughout the simulation exercise (laminated blow-up of the Red Cross Shelter Report form). Enabled easy posting of the current shelter status; aided situational awareness of the shelter manager and all area leads.
 - Lesson learned: shelter status board included shift information which aided the Volunteer Coordinator to determine and post this information. Recommend making a laminated blow-up of the 3 day shift schedule for use by Volunteer Coordination.
- Throughout the exercise, various shelter areas needed assistance (e.g., people to setup cots/tables, offload Red Cross supply vehicle; get answers to questions that could not be answered in their shelter area). The shelter team leader's response was to pass the requests to the shelter operation center for resolution. Reason: the shelter operations center is where coordination can be made to find people to fill the need or get an answer to a question. Also, shelter team members from logistics, information, communications and volunteer coordination are co-located with the shelter operations center, so resources are immediately available.
 - Lesson learned: Shelter areas need practice in referring requests for assistance through the shelter operations center. Review the shelter team operations manual to ensure that procedures for reporting shelter area status and requests for assistance are clear.
 - Need to set up a timeline for reporting significant data to the Operations Center so that the Shelter Manager's report can be ready when called for by the Red Cross Emergency Operations Center. If we open a shelter for real, I am sure that we will receive realistic incremental standard reporting windows so we can keep ahead of ordering expendable supplies, like food, snacks, linen exchange, etc. Once we find out what the standard is we can establish our own reporting times.

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- Overall, an excellent test of the team's flexibility and ability to adapt to changing situations in support of our community.
- At the end of the exercise, the shelter operations center produced the shelter report that was sent to the Red Cross.

Shelter manager:

- Conducted inspection and inventory of the Beulah UMC facility. Assisted by logistics and shelter operations team members.
 - Lesson learned: pay close attention to the Red Cross agreement with the facility to note restrictions on use of the facility: what areas are not available; what equipment cannot be used, or require supervision by the owner (e.g., gas stoves in kitchen).
 - Lesson learned: before sending an advanced party to coordinate the shelter move, inspect and sign for the shelter facility and determine the shelter layout, hold a shelter meeting to review the requirement, identify participants, and make a communications plan for the move. Determine the means of communication, reporting times, and tasks for the advanced party and main body of the shelter team and other factors identified during the team meeting.
- Need cross training for all team members in other shelter areas. This was to be practiced during the exercise, but was overcome by events due to the time it took to set up the shelter.
- The Red Cross Staff made a comment that the Shelter Manager in some cases could not be found when questions needed answers, although the Operations Lead was able to answer the questions. They stated that the Shelter Manager needs to be at their desk in the Operations Center at all times and not running around in other shelter areas. That is why we have Shelter Area Leads. Point well-taken; the Shelter Manager must be able to move around the shelter to maintain situational awareness, see and be seen by the residents and interact with the shelter team.
 - Lesson learned: Shelter Manager locate and operate from the shelter operations center; keep shelter operations informed of your location at all times. Use hand-held radio when available to maintain communications with the operations center.