



February 25, 2021

DC HSEMA Training and Exercise - A Virtual, Dynamic, Activity-based Approach

Through challenge always comes opportunity. Time and again during the COVID-19 pandemic, emergency managers have found that the situation allowed for the acceleration of programmatic changes that were previously in the works, but on a longer-term track, especially with training and exercises. That has certainly been the case for the **District of Columbia's Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency (HSEMA).**



Chief of HSEMA's Preparedness Bureau, Jon Stewart, has been looking to the future with the District's training and exercise program. Over the past year, the agency has been able to make significant progress with evolving their training and exercise program to reflect a more virtual operational environment.

With the pivot to a more virtual process last spring, HSEMA made the push to move to a more **dynamic, activity-based learning approach, moving traditional lecture-based courses to a self-paced, online format.** They started with some of the "G" series courses offered under FEMA's Emergency Management Institute (EMI) umbrella, including ICS-300 – Intermediate ICS for Expanding Incidents. Now, rather than multi-day in-person training requirements, students can go at their own pace and in their own time. To ensure that courses doesn't just become an exercise in the strength of one's mouse clicking finger, courses have accompanying workbooks for students to demonstrate their understanding and competence. For courses like ICS-300, there is also a "live" instructor led session that focuses on group discussion and applying knowledge through collaborative activities.

HSEMA also began to develop several courses that were more District-specific, aimed at preparing the learner for all hazards but with an eye towards the (at the time) upcoming Inauguration. These types of training included a series for District emergency liaison officers (ELOs) in order to prepare them to effectively operate within the Emergency Operations Center.

As part of the broader **preparations for the Inauguration**, D.C. also conducted numerous virtual exercises with partners at all levels of government around the National Capital Region. Starting in the summer of 2020, HSEMA began conducting small and relatively short discussion-based exercises, sometimes just with individual agencies. These **smaller exercises proved incredibly beneficial** leading up to larger exercises and the Inauguration since discussions were more targeted and lessons learned were more easily applied to future exercises or for real world preparations. These exercises also allowed these smaller groups to better understand their level of preparedness and make improvements. An added benefit of these virtual exercises was to further reinforce the use of the virtual operational tools that the District used during the Inauguration.

Post Inauguration, HSEMA plans to continue to build upon these successes. And while in person trainings and exercises will return once it's safe to do so, virtual training and exercises will also continue to be used.

"Tell me and I forget, teach me and I may remember, involve me and I learn."

– Benjamin Franklin

If you have a state practice you'd like to highlight as part of this ongoing series, please contact [Lauren Goodwillie](mailto:Lauren.Goodwillie).

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