



PREPARE
YOUR ORGANIZATION FOR
A WILDFIRE

PLAYBOOK

AMERICA'S
PrepareAthon!SM
BE SMART. TAKE PART. PREPARE.

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America's PrepareAthon! An Introduction

America's PrepareAthon! is a grassroots campaign for action to increase community preparedness and resilience for disasters. The campaign offers free resources for households and organizations to discuss and practice plans and safety measures to improve resilience for specific disasters.

Planning and preparing can make a big difference in being safe and keeping your doors open after a disaster. The ability to maintain or quickly reestablish business operations or organization processes requires a focus on preparedness, advance planning, and relationships with external partners and community leaders.

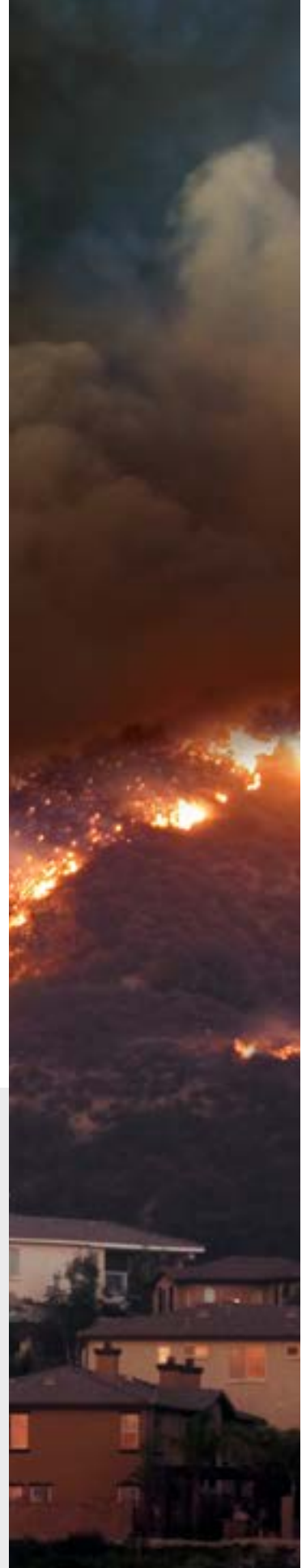
This *Prepare Your Organization for a Wildfire Playbook* provides you, as a community leader or employer, with tools and resources to support your preparedness efforts and to help you conduct an America's PrepareAthon! Day of Action.

Everyone has a role to play to prepare for a disaster. All employers and organizations—from local businesses and municipalities to schools, universities, and faith- and community-based organizations—are essential components of the community and can help people and groups to be more prepared.

GOALS

America's PrepareAthon! has four primary goals. The campaign aims to increase the number of people who:

✓	1. Understand which disasters can happen in their community;
✓	2. Know what to do to be safe and mitigate damage;
✓	3. Take action to increase their preparedness; and
✓	4. Participate in community resilience planning.



Introduction: Participate in America's PrepareAthon!

WHY PARTICIPATE

America's PrepareAthon! enables individuals and organizations to prepare for specific hazards through informative presentations, group discussions and activities, and tabletop exercises. Organizations have tremendous influence on their members and constituents when it comes to preparing for a disaster. For example, when employers encourage employees to prepare for disasters, employees are 75 percent¹ more likely to take action. And with more than 63 percent² of the U.S. population aged 16 or older in the labor force, the workplace is one of the most effective environments for educating and encouraging people to take steps to be ready for disasters. Participating in America's PrepareAthon! will benefit your workplace or community organization by helping you to:

- Increase knowledge of safety policies and procedures;
- Build morale and trust by demonstrating a commitment to safety and well-being;
- Enhance organizational coordination and communication on preparedness and continuity of operations;
- Reduce a disaster's effects, including injury and loss of life, property or inventory damage, and financial loss from business disruption; and
- Strengthen relationships with local emergency responders and community leaders to reach a common understanding of community risks, needs, and capabilities.

1. Preparedness in America, August 2014. www.fema.gov/media-library/assets/documents/94717.

2. U.S. Department of Labor, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey, 2013, www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat03.pdf.

REGISTER YOUR EVENT AND BE COUNTED

Register your participation to prepare for a wildfire on www.ready.gov/prepare and join other organizations across the country in an effort to improve our nation's preparedness and resiliency. Registration is quick and easy. Simply select your state, wildfire, your type of participation, and the estimated number of people participating. You can also choose to have your organization's name listed on the America's PrepareAthon! website in recognition of your commitment.



HOW TO PARTICIPATE

Participating in America's PrepareAthon! is easy and inexpensive. This *Prepare Your Organization for a Wildfire Playbook* provides some simple steps you can take to increase the preparedness of your organization by holding an America's PrepareAthon! Day of Action. Your organization can participate in several ways:

- Hold discussions and drills to explain workplace plans and policies and to motivate your employees, students, congregants, and volunteers to be better prepared at home.
- Conduct a table-top exercise with leaders and managers to take steps as an organization to increase your readiness.

Prepare Your People: Hold a Preparedness Discussion

1

One of the most effective ways to share information and motivate people to take steps for personal preparedness is to talk to your people. Add a preparedness discussion to the agenda of your next staff or organizational meeting or arrange a brown bag lunch session. Many individuals within an organization can lead a preparedness discussion, including a manager, employee, teacher, or volunteer. You can cover the basics in 15 minutes; 30 minutes provides time for more discussion. **Get the conversation started!**

PREPAREDNESS DISCUSSION GOALS

As you prepare for your talk, keep the following goals in mind to ensure you facilitate a productive and informative discussion.

- Share the potential impact of wildfires—the majority of injuries and death occur when people do not evacuate in time and are overcome by smoke and heat.
- Know the National Weather Service (NWS) terms that are used to describe changing fire conditions. These terms—advisories, watches, and warnings—can be used to determine the timeline and severity of fire danger.
- Emphasize the importance of being prepared to evacuate by remembering the 5 Ps: People, Prescriptions, Papers, Personal Needs, and Priceless Items.
- Explain how to protect your property by creating defensible space.
- Outline your organization’s emergency communications plans and policies.
- Sign up for community notifications.



1 | Prepare Your People: Hold a Preparedness Discussion

BEFORE YOUR PREPAREDNESS DISCUSSION

1. Ensure management and organizational leadership are on board by sharing the benefits of participating and the minimal time needed.
2. Download and review the *How to Prepare for a Wildfire* guide and other resources and be sure discussion leaders are familiar with the content.
3. Learn how to sign up for local text alerts and warnings available in your community.
4. Register your event at www.ready.gov/prepare to be counted. You can also download Certificates of Participation for discussion participants.
5. Promote your America's PrepareAthon! Day of Action preparedness discussion. Use your organization's communications platforms, including websites, listservs, newsletters, and social media to invite and remind participants of the discussion and to demonstrate your commitment to safety.

RESOURCES



In addition to this Playbook, you will need to download the following America's PrepareAthon! resources, all available at www.ready.gov/prepare:

- *How to Prepare for a Wildfire*
- *Be Smart: Know Your Alerts and Warnings*

- *Be Smart: Protect Your Critical Documents and Valuables*
- *Ready's Family Communication Plan for Parents and Kids*

There are also one short video that can help you set the stage for your discussions:

- *It Started Like Any Other Day*, a four-minute video that focuses on three survivors from three recent disasters

FOLLOW-UP

Ask follow-up questions in future meetings to ensure everyone has learned the important steps to take now to prepare for a wildfire and that everyone knows the organization's communications plan for a wildfire.



TEST YOUR EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS PLANS

Consider testing your employee notification plan with employees and volunteers to ensure you will be able to communicate with them effectively in case of emergency—both during and outside of business operating hours. This could be as simple as sending an email, a text alert, or testing a public address system to ensure leadership can provide critical emergency guidance when needed. Be sure to identify these communications by starting with “THIS IS A TEST” to avoid any confusion.

1 | Prepare Your People: Hold a Preparedness Discussion

SUGGESTIONS FOR YOUR DISCUSSION

Talking about disasters and helping others prepare makes everyone safer. In your discussion, note how a wildfire can immobilize your entire region. A wildfire can occur anywhere and can destroy homes, businesses, infrastructure, natural resources, and agriculture. Transportation, gas, power, communications, and other services may be disrupted. Flying embers can set fire to buildings more than a mile away. Damage to the landscape can cause flash flooding and mudslides can result. Your goal for protection is to take steps to protect your property in advance of a wildfire and plan to evacuate early. The following outline is intended to help you share important information and facts about wildfires during your discussion.

AGENDA

DISCUSSION GUIDE

SHOW: *It Started Like Any Other Day* (survivor stories video).

It Started Like Any Other Day is a four-minute video that communicates the importance of disaster preparedness. It shows survivors from three American communities talking about three different types of disasters: hurricane, tornado, and wildfire.

Hold a short group discussion, asking participants to share any experiences they have had with a wildfire, including surprises and lessons learned.

DISTRIBUTE: *How to Prepare for a Wildfire* guide.

Explain that the session will go over the key parts of the guide. Discuss the potential impacts of a wildfire, the causes of death and injury, and any relevant experiences in your community.

It is important to be aware of changing weather conditions to give yourself time to take action. You can monitor National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association (NOAA) Weather Radio or other local news channels for critical information from the National Weather Service (NWS).

DISCUSS: ALERTS & WARNINGS

Plan to evacuate early.

Show the group how to download the FEMA app and to sign up for local alerts.

HANDOUT: *Be Smart, Know Your Alerts and Warnings.*

It is important to know the terms used to describe changing fire conditions and what actions to take. These terms can be used to determine the timeline and severity of fire danger. Watches, warnings, and evacuation notices are science-based predictions that are intended to provide adequate time for evacuation. For more information on these terms and the impact associated with them, consult the *How to Prepare for a Wildfire* guide.

- **FIRE WEATHER WATCH:** The NWS issues a Fire Weather Watch when potentially dangerous fire weather conditions are possible in the next 12-72 hours.
- **FIRE WEATHER/RED FLAG WARNING:** The NWS issues a Fire Weather/Red Flag Warning when fire danger exists and weather patterns support that wildfires are either occurring or expected to occur within 24 hours.
- **EVACUATION NOTICE:** If the danger is significant, local authorities may issue an evacuation notice to alert residents to leave the area immediately. Listen closely to emergency reports and take appropriate action. Evacuate when instructed to avoid being trapped by advancing fire.

Remember the Five Ps of Evacuation: People, Prescriptions, Papers, Personal Needs, and Priceless Items.

1 | Prepare Your People: Hold a Preparedness Discussion

AGENDA

DISCUSSION GUIDE (continued)

DISCUSS: PROTECT YOUR PROPERTY

Explain how to create defensible space around your home or business.

Take steps now to reduce the sources of fuel in and around your home or business, use fire-resistant construction materials when possible, and clear the surrounding area of combustible materials. The National Fire Protection Association recommends removing flammable materials, such as leaves, debris, firewood, and propane tanks within 30 feet of your home, garage, or shed. Prune trees so lowest branches are 6-10 feet from the ground.

DISCUSS: EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS PLANS

Review the plan for your organization if you have one.

HANDOUT: *Ready's Family Communication Plan for Parents and Kids.*

Every family should have a plan for how to communicate with each other during and after a wildfire.

Encourage people to identify an out-of-state contact, such as a friend or relative, to notify when they are safe. In some cases it may be easiest to use social media and post an "I'm OK" message to many friends at once.

Text, do not talk. Text messages can often get around network disruptions when a phone call might not be able to get through.

EXPLAIN: IMPORTANCE OF STORING CRITICAL DOCUMENTS

HANDOUT: *Be Smart, Protect Your Critical Documents and Valuables.*

Explain that you should have access to insurance policies, financial records, medication information, and other household records so that after the disaster you can begin the recovery process.

Encourage everyone to take the time now to gather and protect their critical information and documents.

EMERGENCY SUPPLIES HANDOUT

Distribute *Building a Home Emergency Supply Kit* checklist from the *How to Prepare for a Wildfire* guide (or ask the group to turn to this page). If possible, have basic supply kit contents on a table for people to see or to use as visual aids during your discussion.



Emphasize the necessity for everyone to have some basic supplies on hand to survive for at least three days if an emergency occurs.



Show how building a supply kit is easy and inexpensive, noting that many items may already be in the home or can be found at your local grocery store, pharmacy, or hardware store.



Highlight that kits should include items such as non-perishable food, water, a battery-powered or hand-crank radio, extra flashlights, and batteries.



Be sure to consider if there are specialty items you need, such as prescription medications, extra pair of glasses, infant formula and diapers, and pet food.



Discuss the need to consider storing supplies in several locations, including your workplace, vehicle, and other places you regularly spend time. If you live an area at risk for wildfires, you should locate your supplies somewhere you can grab them quickly.

Prepare Your Organization: Hold a Tabletop Exercise

2

A tabletop exercise is a facilitated discussion about what your organization would do in response to a disaster. The exercise leads participants through a simulated disaster scenario and prompts them to examine their plans, policies, and procedures without disrupting the work environment. It allows for a facilitated discussion of roles, procedures, and responsibilities in the context of a simulated emergency scenario.

The goals for the exercise are as follows:

1. To assess your organization's ability to respond using your current plans, policies, capabilities, and resources; and
2. To help identify improvements that could make the difference in keeping your people safe and doors open after a disaster.

For organizations that do not currently do this type of planning, conducting this exercise as part of your America's PrepareAthon! Day of Action can be an important next step in improving your organization's preparedness and resiliency.

This Playbook provides guidance on how to hold a tabletop exercise to help your organization assess and improve its ability to maintain or reestablish operations when affected by a wildfire. Many individuals within your organization can lead this effort: a senior leader, an employee, a facility manager, a human resources manager, or a program manager. Use this Playbook, *How to Prepare for a Wildfire*, and the companion slide deck available on www.ready.gov/prepare to help you.



2 | Prepare Your Organization: Hold a Tabletop Exercise

EXERCISE OVERVIEW

To simulate an actual event, the *Prepare Your Organization* tabletop exercise begins with an initial scenario description and proceeds with two scenario updates. Each phase of the scenario includes discussion questions to allow participants to focus on problem solving as a leadership team in a low-stress, consequence-free environment. This exercise is not meant to assess individual performance, but rather, it is an opportunity to identify and resolve problems, improve workplace safety, and bolster your organization's continuity of operations.

EXERCISE OBJECTIVES

These tabletop exercises are designed to help your organization identify strengths and weaknesses in the following areas:

FACILITIES:

Structural maintenance considerations; using fire retardant chemicals; creating defensible space; back-up power supplies; supplies for staying on-site; accessibility considerations; and emergency repairs.

HUMAN RESOURCES

POLICIES: Employee notification and alerts;

early release/telework policies; flexible work schedules; payroll and insurance policies; employee insurance policies; employee/family reunification procedures; employees trained in first-aid with access to medical supplies; and capacity to ensure accessibility for individuals with disabilities or access and functional needs.

CONTINUITY OF OPERATIONS PLANS:

Plans to operate at an alternate location; access to important data; roles and responsibilities; insurance policies; supplier and customer relationship management; and plans and processes to resume operations.

EMERGENCY OPERATIONS

PLANS: Ability to provide critical information and updates during the emergency through multiple notification systems; guidance on how to protect critical assets; plans to provide first aid; and protocols for communicating with local first responders and critical infrastructure providers.



TIME COMMITMENT

The tabletop exercise should last approximately 2–3 hours, depending on the amount of discussion and needed breaks. This includes time for introductions, an overview of the process, the exercise, and a debriefing. While this may seem like a lot of time, especially for busy managers, the investment will pay dividends both in a real emergency or disaster and in improving day-to-day operations.

2 | Prepare Your Organization: Hold a Tabletop Exercise

GETTING STARTED

Once your organization's leadership agrees to hold a tabletop exercise, the following steps will lead you through the planning process and help your organization get the most value from the exercise.

SELECT A LEAD PLANNER

1

The lead planner has primary responsibility for executing the exercise, to include working with leadership to select participants, customizing the scenario description and questions to fit your community and your organization, and planning logistics. The lead planner serves as the primary point of contact for participants who have questions about the exercise and materials.

SELECT THE FACILITATOR

2

The facilitator leads the exercise discussion, provides scenario updates, and prompts participants to interact. A facilitator who understands the scope of your organization's operations may have greater success in stimulating a productive discussion.

IDENTIFY WHO SHOULD PARTICIPATE

3

To examine your organization's operations during the tabletop exercise, you need to include representatives from across your enterprise. Consider key decision makers and subject matter experts from all departments, including senior leadership, facilities management, communications and public affairs, information technology (IT) services, corporate security, human resources, and legal. You also may wish to include third-party vendors such as phone, IT, data back-up, food, and other critical services.

For the exercise discussion to be as spontaneous and realistic as possible, it is important not to share the scenario or discussion questions with invited participants or observers in advance of the exercise.

DETERMINE ROLES

4

There are different roles for "players" in an exercise as outlined below. The lead planner decides who should attend and to which role he or she is assigned.

PARTICIPANT: Someone with decision-making authority (or a designated proxy), who has authority over a component of operations (e.g., Human Resources Manager). Participants should sit at the table, answer questions, and make decisions during the exercise.

OBSERVER: Someone who benefits from attending the exercise because his or her role in the organization may include implementing identified recommendations. To keep the number of speakers manageable, observers do not participate in the exercise, but are encouraged to take notes and provide feedback at the end.

NOTE-TAKER: Someone who can record the discussion during the exercise and summarize the main points as a follow-up report. You may even want to have the main points recorded on a white board. Encourage participants and observers to take notes during the exercise for the debriefing following the end of the exercise.

2 | Prepare Your Organization: Hold a Tabletop Exercise

GETTING STARTED (continued)

PLAN THE LOGISTICS

5

The lead planner should address the logistics ahead of time to make sure the exercise goes smoothly.

LOCATION: The room should be large enough for all participants and observers. Set up the room so that everyone can see and hear each other. If participants do not know one another, consider having table tents or name badges with names and departments identified.

INVITATIONS: Send invitations to participants with an explanation of what a tabletop exercise is and what role they will play. You should consider sending a save-the-date as soon as the exercise date is determined, followed by a more detailed invitation once the lead planner establishes the objectives, agenda, and logistics (e.g., event location).

EQUIPMENT AND MATERIALS: Print enough copies of any materials (e.g., agenda, PowerPoint presentation, and an evaluation form) in advance for all attendees. Collect any other materials you would like to have in the room for easy reference during the exercise, such as existing policies or other manuals. If you are using white boards, make sure you have the easels and markers on hand.



2 | Prepare Your Organization: Hold a Tabletop Exercise

WILDFIRE EXERCISE: INITIAL SCENARIO

Read the Scenario aloud.

Tuesday, 11:00 a.m.: With temperatures soaring over the past week—plus a rise in winds and a significant drop in humidity levels—outdoor burning bans are in place for campsites, forest land, and mountainous areas throughout the state. Local media outlets report that fire departments and the U.S. Forest Service have responded to and contained several small brush fires in

remote areas. According to the National Weather Service, the combination of dry fuels and weather conditions has drastically increases the risk of extreme fire danger, and it issues a Fire Weather Warning or Red Flag Warning. The threat for wildfire has been extended to more densely populated areas, including communities built within any proximity to wildfire-prone lands.

WILDFIRE INITIAL SCENARIO QUESTIONS

(suggested time: 20–25 minutes)

<p>1 Who in the organization is responsible for monitoring or would likely hear or receive a bulletin or alert from the National Weather Service or other alerting authority? How would they receive this information?</p>	<p>PROMPT: Do they know the meaning of a warning (as compared to a watch) and what guidance should be issued? Would power be needed to receive this information?</p>
<p>2 What information are you sharing with your [employees/parents/students/volunteers/congregants] at this time? What are the current process and communications platform(s) used to notify employees of potential threats or hazards, including those who are out of the building?</p>	<p>PROMPT: Who decides when and how to share information about potentially dangerous conditions? What communication platforms do you use regularly (e.g., email, messenger, smart phone, push-to-talk, radio, loud speaker, written)? Are these systems dependent on community sources of power? Have you made adequate accommodations for notifying anyone with a communication access need?</p>
<p>3 When a Fire Weather Warning or Red Flag Warning is issued, emergency responders prepare for increased fire danger. When you know that the threat of a wildfire exists, what are your immediate concerns?</p>	<p>PROMPT: Are there components of your organization or specific operations that would be affected by a potential wildfire (e.g., outdoor operations, delivery drivers)? Are there protocols in place in case the wildfire threat increases and an evacuation order is issued?</p>
<p>4 What, if any, decisions should be made at this time? Who can make those decisions (name, position/role)?</p>	<p>PROMPT: Is there anything you can do at this time to protect a facility from damage? Are there records or equipment that should be moved? Has a fire professional or structural engineer examined the building to identify ways your organization can better protect against wildfire damage, such as treating combustible materials with fire-retardant chemicals or creating defensible space around buildings?</p>

2 | Prepare Your Organization: Hold a Tabletop Exercise

WILDFIRE EXERCISE: SCENARIO UPDATE #1

Read the Scenario Update aloud.

Tuesday, 3:00 p.m.: The U.S. Forest Service spots a fire 40 miles outside of town. The fire is spreading rapidly, threatening numerous acres of forest and moving in the direction of **[your community]**. Several buildings have already burned on properties outside of **[your community]**; heavy smoke is reducing visibility and air quality, and a major electrical transformer is destroyed,

causing widespread power outages. The local fire chief warns that at the fire's current rate of spread, it will reach residential and business areas within 24 hours if not contained. A mandatory evacuation is issued for **[your community]**, which includes your workplace. Schools are closed and roads throughout the area are jammed with people trying to leave.

WILDFIRE SCENARIO UPDATE #1 QUESTIONS

(suggested time: 20–25 minutes)

<p>1 What are your immediate actions and priorities in the first 10-15 minutes?</p>	<p>PROMPT: Who is in charge? How are leaders communicating with each other? Has anyone been trained in the National Incident Management System or the Incident Command System?</p>
<p>2 What information are you sharing with [employees/parents/students/volunteers/congregants]? How are you communicating about the status of your operations?</p>	<p>PROMPT: Do you have an alternate plan for communications if traditional systems are damaged or the power is out? Are your on-site communications systems redundant? Do you have a back-up system?</p>
<p>3 Do you have a process in place to account for all your employees and visitors? If people cannot be located or contacted, what—if any—processes do you have to account for them?</p>	<p>PROMPT: How do you know who is on-site at any given time? How is that information communicated to those who need it?</p> <p>NOTE: If your facility has multiple shifts, ask what decisions might be made regarding second and/or third shift operations.</p>
<p>4 Based on the forecast, it seems likely that your facility will experience significant damage in the next 24 hours. What decisions need to be made at this time, and who needs to make them?</p>	<p>PROMPT: What actions need to occur before you leave your facility? What systems need to be closed down or records need to be secured? Are your employees prepared to work remotely or telework for an extended period of time?</p>

2 | Prepare Your Organization: Hold a Tabletop Exercise

WILDFIRE EXERCISE: SCENARIO UPDATE #2

Read the Scenario Update aloud.

Thursday, 8:00 a.m.: Although the fire continues to burn in remote areas, firefighters have made significant progress in recent days, aided by unexpected rain showers and calmer winds. Evacuation orders have been lifted for **[your community]**, but hundreds of people remain in shelters, awaiting permission to return to their homes. Local law enforcement has restricted access to heavily damaged areas and established

a curfew in some portions of the community to prevent looting. Power remains out in several major residential areas. You are granted permission to inspect the damage to your facility and discover extensive fire and smoke damage to three-quarters of your space. Equipment, including computers, servers, and telecommunications hardware, is badly damaged. Your records storage area has significant fire damage.

WILDFIRE SCENARIO UPDATE #2 QUESTIONS

(suggested time: 20–25 minutes)

1

Now that you know the extent of the damage to your facility(ies), do you have options that allow you to continue operations?

PROMPT: How long can you continue to operate without access to your primary facility?

K-12 AND HIGHER ED PROMPT: What decisions are being made about the continuation or completion of the school year? What information is being communicated to students and faculty at this time? What short- and long-term actions will be needed to support those students and faculty residing on campus?

HOUSE OF WORSHIP PROMPT: What decisions are being made about resuming the worship schedule? What information is being communicated to congregants at this time?

2

Can you access copies of your vital documents, such as insurance papers, financial information, and key business documents and records?

PROMPT: Do you have the resources/insurance coverage in place to cover disaster related expenses?

3

How are you communicating with **[employee/volunteers]** regarding their work status? What are your expectations for **[employee/volunteers]** who cannot work, either because your organization is not operational or because they have suffered personal losses?

PROMPT: How are these expectations communicated? Will employees be paid for time they cannot work due to the wildfire? How will employees be paid?

2 | Prepare Your Organization: Hold a Tabletop Exercise



WILDFIRE SCENARIO UPDATE #2 QUESTIONS (continued)

4

What critical services do your **[employees/volunteers]** rely upon to be at work (e.g., power, transit, schools/day care)?

PROMPT: What can you do if these critical services are not restored for some time, even if your facility(ies) is/are operational? Do you have contact information for critical infrastructure providers in your area, such as communications and utilities? Do you know how to find out when these services will be restored?

5

Experiencing disasters can be upsetting, so it is important to pay attention to the emotional reactions of your **[employees/volunteers]**. How is your organization prepared to support individuals who express anxiety or stress?

6

What is the long-term impact of this wildfire on your **[facility/organization]**? Are there any steps you can take now that may lessen the impact of any event like this in the future?

7

What can you do to support the community as it recovers? How can you improve your network and relationships to be better connected to the community to prepare for future events?

2 | Prepare Your Organization: Hold a Tabletop Exercise

FACILITATOR GUIDE – EXERCISE STRUCTURE

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

(suggested time:
10 minutes)

1

Begin the exercise by introducing yourself and provide a short overview of the exercise objectives and process. Emphasize that the purpose of the exercise is to identify strengths and weaknesses of current plans, policies, and procedures to strengthen the organization’s resilience to disruptive events. Explain the roles of the facilitator, participants, observers, and note-takers.

Ask participants to introduce themselves, state their role within the organization and in the tabletop exercise. After introductions, remind everyone to share responsibility for making the exercise useful and productive. Review the agenda, ground rules, and logistics information.

EXERCISE AND DISCUSSION

(suggested time:
1.5 - 2 hours)

2

Once you have provided the overview, begin by introducing the scenario and answering the questions. Read the scenario aloud, and provide a handout of the scenario, if desired. To simulate a real event, the scenario unfolds through updates. Each update includes an additional set of questions for participants.

It is important to take the hypothetical scenario seriously and for each participant to imagine as realistically as possible what he or she would be thinking, feeling, and doing from both a professional and a personal perspective. The discussion should address the specifics of your organization—your workforce, your facilities, and your policies. To provide context, reference actual events that have occurred in your area or in your state.

DEBRIEFING AND NEXT STEPS

(suggested time:
20 minutes)

3

Once you have concluded the exercise, it is critical to debrief and establish follow-up plans. A debriefing is simply a review of the exercise and an opportunity to identify next steps. Keep this summary simple by asking for input to create a list of the areas identified as major strengths and areas for improvement. Suggested prompts:

- What weaknesses in your organization’s emergency plans did this exercise expose?
- What unanticipated issues arose during the exercise?
- What gaps were identified?
- What are the high-priority issues that should be addressed?
- What are new ideas and recommendations for improvement?
- Were the exercise objectives met?

End the session by thanking everyone for their participation and their honest feedback. Explain leadership’s commitment to using the exercise as a building block to greater organizational safety and resilience in ongoing management planning and in meetings with staff.

2 | Prepare Your Organization: Hold a Tabletop Exercise

FACILITATOR GUIDE – TIPS FOR FACILITATING A PRODUCTIVE TABLETOP EXERCISE

This guide is designed to help you facilitate a discussion about what your organization would do in response to a wildfire. The facilitator should review all the materials in the Playbook and all the referenced materials, including the links for additional resources, in advance of the exercise. Adequate preparation by the facilitator is the best way to ensure a successful and productive exercise. After reviewing the materials:

	Review the objectives and ensure exercise discussions will meet all objectives.
	Customize the scenario and/or questions so that they are specific to your organization, your facilities, and the services you provide. If the days or times provided affect how your organization would respond to the event, consider different times and days as you discuss the scenario. Review the scenario and follow-up questions and add any additional questions or issues specific to your organization's workforce, organizational structure, or facilities.
	Review the information at www.ready.gov/individuals-access-functional-needs and consider the needs of individuals in your organization with disabilities or access and functional needs.
	Review the list of participants and make sure you know their role in the organization.
	Ensure all logistics are taken care of, including: for all participants and observers, nametags or table tents, and handouts.
	Discuss the exercise with the note-taker(s) so that they are prepared for the topics to be addressed in the discussion.
	Ensure the room has been properly set up so that all participants, observers, and note-takers have adequate visibility of the screen and can hear the discussions.
	Ask open-ended questions, using the words "what," "when," "where," "how," and "why." If necessary, direct questions to specific participants or areas of the organization.
	Encourage conversation and give extra encouragement to those who may be hesitant to participate in the conversation.

2 | Prepare Your Organization: Hold a Tabletop Exercise

FACILITATOR GUIDE – TIPS FOR FACILITATING A PRODUCTIVE TABLETOP EXERCISE

(continued)

✓	Elicit suggestions for how to improve issues that arise during the exercise discussion.
✓	Involve all participants. Do not let one or two participants monopolize the discussions.
✓	Assist the group by summarizing a point, restating a key discussion point, and asking specific individuals to comment.
✓	Avoid the temptation to jump in with the solutions when participants are struggling and, instead, try to draw out the answers from them. Participants are more likely to contribute if they feel that people are listening intently and sympathetically.
✓	Watch for signs of frustration or conflict. Remember that the exercise is not a test, but an opportunity to identify areas for improvement. If you see mounting frustration or conflict, pause the exercise and suggest a break.
✓	Ensure you complete all the scenario updates to meet the exercise objectives. Monitor the time per module. If the discussion is relevant and meaningful, consider continuing the discussion past the agenda time, and make up time in the next module. Moving too quickly may not allow solutions to come forward. Conversely, moving along so slowly that nothing of substance is decided defeats the purpose of the exercise.
✓	Ensure that discussions remain within the scope of the given discussion area. Sometimes the conversation may begin to drift to topics more appropriate for discussion in later periods of the exercise, or the conversation may get stuck on a problem area that will need to be resolved later. To keep the discussion moving, use a “parking lot” technique to record difficult issues that can be discussed more fully later.

FOLLOW-UP IS CRITICAL

After the exercise, be sure to follow through with addressing the gaps and recommended improvements identified by participants in a timely fashion. Your organization’s leadership should create a plan that lists what items need to be addressed, who is responsible for executing those tasks, and when resolution is expected. Develop or update your organization’s emergency operations plan and test it at least annually. The investment to prepare and to routinely review policies, plans, and communications will strengthen your organization and build resilience to the challenges and events that may lie ahead.

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In addition to holding a preparedness discussion or a tabletop exercise for a wildfire, prepare and plan for other hazards you might face. Visit www.ready.gov/prepare for risk information and preparedness resources on other hazards. The following resources can help keep your preparedness momentum moving all year long.

- The Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication training program draws from lessons learned during public health emergencies and incorporates best practices from the fields of risk and crisis communication. For course materials, visit <http://emergency.cdc.gov/cerc/>.
- The National Incident Management System (NIMS) and the Incident Command System (ICS) are used by emergency managers to provide a standard vocabulary and process to manage emergencies. It is a valuable organizing and management tool for any organization. Free training is available online at <https://training.fema.gov/IS/NIMS.aspx>.
- Practice the Continuity of Operations (COOP) Plan of your business or organization, or visit www.fema.gov/continuity-operations to learn about the importance of having a continuity of operations plan.
- The American Red Cross Ready Rating program is a free, self-guided program designed to help businesses, organizations, and schools become better prepared for emergencies. Members complete a three-point self-assessment of their level of preparedness and have access to tools, tips, and best practices to help improve their level of preparedness. Visit www.readyrating.org.
- A Workplace Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) Program can help prepare employees to help others before professional responders arrive. For more information on Workplace CERT, visit www.fema.gov/community-emergency-response-teams.



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RESOURCES TO ASSIST WITH FOLLOW-UP PLANNING

- To find out more about how to improve your structure at Fire - A Homebuilder's Guide to Construction in Wildfire Zones, visit www.fema.gov/media-library-data/20130726-1652-20490-4085/fema_p_737.pdf.
- The American Red Cross can provide on-site first aid trainings. For more information, go to www.redcross.org/take-a-class.
- To learn about Federal financial assistance after a disaster, visit www.fema.gov/help-after-disaster.
- To help individuals who may express discomfort or anxiety dealing with disasters, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's Disaster Technical Assistance Center provides a host of relevant materials available at www.samhsa.gov/dtac/.
- The disaster distress helpline is a resource for people who want help coping with overwhelming stress from a disaster. It's free. Call 1-800-985-5990 or text TalkWithUs to 66746 or TTY for Deaf/Hearing Impaired: 1-800-846-8517.
- For Institutions of Higher Education, download the Action Guide for Emergency Management at Institutions of Higher Education at http://rems.ed.gov/docs/REMS_ActionGuide.pdf.
- Visit the Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) Technical Assistance (TA) Center sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education for information on emergency operations plans (EOPs) and emergency management planning efforts at www.rems.ed.gov.

OPPORTUNITIES TO ENGAGE WITH YOUR COMMUNITY

In addition to preparing your organization, it is important to understand your local and tribal community emergency operations plans and to work with other organizations in your community or tribe. Opportunities to participate in whole community planning include the following:

- Contact your State, Local and/or Tribal Emergency Manager to identify emergency management resources in your area. For contact information, visit: www.fema.gov/state-offices-and-agencies-emergency-management or www.fema.gov/fema-tribal-affairs.
- Learn about Public-Private Partnerships: www.fema.gov/public-private-partnerships.
- Participate in local or tribal organizations that make your community a safer and more prepared place to live and do business, such as your local Citizen Corps Council, hazard mitigation planning team, or local and tribal Community Emergency Management Team (CERT). Citizen Corps Councils include representatives from all sectors of the community. This whole community membership helps to ensure the community perspective is reflected in local emergency management practices: www.ready.gov/citizen-corps.

