



NYC EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT Tabletop Exercise Toolkit

**Facilitator Guide
Coastal Storm, Response Phase**

Version 1.0



COASTAL STORM RESPONSE SCENARIO

Congratulations, you have been identified as the facilitator for the upcoming tabletop exercise. Whether this is your first time as a facilitator or you have experience, please use this document to help guide you through this process. Thank you for taking on this important role on behalf of the organization.

Before you continue, make sure you are familiar with the scope and objectives set by the organizers and planning team for the tabletop exercise. If those have not yet been identified, please refer to the Organizer's Guide for assistance.

This scenario, based on a fictional coastal storm making landfall in New York City and affecting your primary facility, is designed to test your initial response to a no-notice incident. At the start of the incident, participants must deal with initial reactions, as well incomplete information and uncertainty about safety conditions. As the scenario continues, the focus shifts to business continuity concerns. This scenario does not cover the recovery phase; that will be the subject of a forthcoming scenario.

This Facilitator Guide contains the text that will appear on the PowerPoint. Certain slides also include questions that you may use to encourage discussion. The questions are categorized based on the business continuity function to which they pertain, as a way to help you steer discussion to areas relevant to your participants and exercise objectives. Not all of these questions will be relevant to your organization or to the particular participants. Additionally, in some cases, you may want to re-word the questions to prompt the participants to identify the problems that the questions address.

FACILITATOR GUIDE

Introduction

This facilitator manual contains some background about tabletop exercises, suggestions for how to run a successful tabletop exercise, as well as the current exercise scenario with possible questions to encourage discussion, and notes detailing the purpose of certain slides.

Background

What is a Tabletop Exercise?

A tabletop exercise is a facilitated discussion of a plan in an informal, stress-free environment. It is like a problem-solving or brainstorming session where participants share capabilities and solve problems as a group based on their organization's existing plans and the determined objectives of the exercise.

The success of a tabletop exercise is determined by feedback from participants and the impact the feedback has on the evaluation and revision of policies, plans, and procedures.

What a Tabletop Exercise is Not

A tabletop exercise is neither the tool through which you make a plan nor the place for training and discussion about a plan. A prior step to holding a tabletop exercise is often a workshop to train and discuss a plan. This toolkit is meant to be used once your organization has a plan in place and is ready to evaluate it.

Why Run a Tabletop Exercise?

Tabletop exercises build organizational capacity, help organizations evaluate their business continuity plans and identify strengths and areas for improvement. These exercises provide training and awareness to staff who have an opportunity to rehearse their roles and responsibilities during an incident. Plus, they are low-cost and low-stakes.

How Long is a Tabletop Exercise?

A tabletop exercise usually lasts from 1 to 4 hours, but can vary depending on the incident. Discussion times are open-ended, and participants are encouraged to take their time in arriving at in-depth decisions without time pressure. When the time is up, the activity is concluded.

There is never a perfect moment to run a tabletop exercise for everyone, but try to do so at a time that doesn't compete for everyone's attention.

Facilitating a Tabletop Exercise

The facilitator has a number of responsibilities, including:

- Introducing the narrative
- Encouraging problem solving
- Controlling the pace and flow of the exercise
- Stimulating discussion and drawing answers and solutions from the group (rather than supplying them)

Setting the Stage

The opening remarks and activities influence the whole exercise experience. Participants need to know what to expect, and to feel comfortable about being participants. Consider including the following elements at the start of your exercise:

- Begin by sincerely welcoming participants and putting them at ease.
- Brief the participants about what will happen. This should include a clear explanation of the exercise's purpose and objectives, agenda, ground rules, and procedures.
- Start the exercise by reading (or having someone read) the first two slides of background information.
- Try breaking the ice by beginning with a general question directed at one or two high-ranking individuals or to the group as a whole. Later, other questions can be addressed to other individuals.

Ways to Involve All Participants

It is important that everyone participates and that no one person dominates the discussion. Tips for involving all of the participants are summarized below:

- Give extra encouragement to those who are a little tentative.
- Recognize that junior staff might be hesitant to comment in front of senior management.
- Avoid the temptation to jump in with the right solutions when participants are struggling. This can hamper discussion. Instead, try to draw out answers from participants. They will be more likely to participate if they feel people are listening intently and sympathetically.
- Model and encourage the behaviors you want from participants.
- Make eye contact with participants.
- Acknowledge comments in a positive manner.

Controlling and Sustaining the Action

To maintain a high level of interest and to keep everyone involved, the facilitator needs to control and sustain the action. There are several ways to do this.

- Vary the pace. Give messages at different rates, perhaps even giving two at once to increase pace and interest.
- Maintain a balance between overly talking about a problem to death and moving along so fast that nothing gets settled. Don't hesitate to control the exercise tightly.
- Watch for signs of frustration or conflict. Always remember that the tabletop is an opportunity to evaluate your plan in a no-fault environment and gaps should be expected. People may be sensitive or inexperienced. If you see mounting frustration or conflict, stop the exercise. Reach into your experience as a discussion leader to help participants resolve conflicts and feel comfortable.
- Keep it low-key. Avoid a bad experience by keeping in mind the low-key nature of the tabletop.
- If you spend all of your time on one big problem, maintain interest among participants, and reach consensus, then the tabletop can be considered a success. Push the participants past superficial solutions. A few carefully chosen, open-ended questions can keep the discussion going to a logical conclusion.
- Remember that not everyone will be equally knowledgeable about the plan that is being evaluated.

Note: The point is not to debate or discuss the City's response; the key is to be aware of the response and see how they impact your organization's response.

Using the Possible Questions

The questions that accompany the following scenario slides cover a broad range of plan components that can be evaluated. It is recommended that only the questions relevant to the tabletop exercise's scope and purpose be discussed. Not every question needs to be asked, and each scenario can be used multiple times to test different components of your plan. For example, if the goal is to evaluate the organization's communications strategy, it may not be necessary to ask participants about operating from a backup facility. Use your best judgement when deciding what questions to ask. Facilitator notes are also included on some of the slides to help you better understand the context.

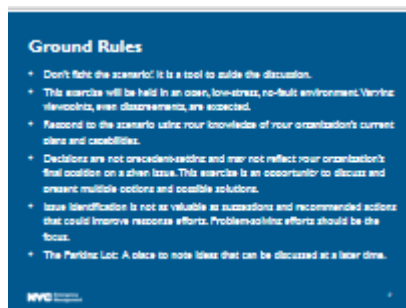
Scenario Slides & Possible Questions



1 Tabletop Exercise

Disclaimer: These customizable exercise templates were created for the use of private sector organizations by New York City Emergency Management (NYCEM). NYCEM is not responsible for any changes made to exercise materials by participating organizations. The scenarios presented are fictional and NYCEM cannot guarantee that the City agency actions depicted here will be the City's response for similar incidents. For more information about the resources NYC

Emergency Management have available, please visit us at [NYC.gov/emergencymanagement](https://nyc.gov/emergencymanagement) or email us at publicprivate@oem.nyc.gov.



2 Ground Rules

Don't fight the scenario! It is a tool to guide the discussion.

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 your organization's current plans and capabilities.

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 efforts. Problem-solving efforts should be the focus. The Parking Lot: A place to note ideas that can be discussed at a later time.

Facilitator Notes:

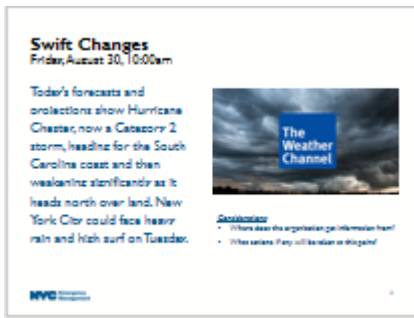
- Make sure to explain in basic terms what a tabletop exercise is and how it works.
- Gently explain why the parking lot exists and the importance of keeping the conversation on track.



3 Background, Thursday Evening, 5:45 PM

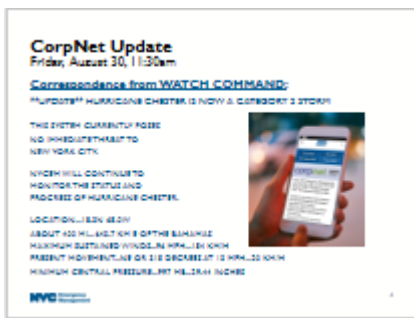
The summer has been long and unusually hot, but the forecast for the coming weekend looks excellent, with sun and pleasant temperatures promised through Labor Day on Monday. Several of your organization's employees are taking advantage of the long weekend to travel out of town. The head of your division, who will be in South Carolina until Wednesday, checks the forecast before leaving for the airport. "The weather looks clear all along the East Coast. Tropical Storm Chester has just strengthened into a Category 1 hurricane about 400 miles east of the Bahamas, but that's far away."

Storm Chester has just strengthened into a Category 1 hurricane about 400 miles east of the Bahamas, but that's far away."



4 Swift Changes, Friday Morning, 10:00 AM

Today's forecasts and projections show Hurricane Chester, now a Category 2 storm, heading for the South Carolina coast and then weakening significantly as it heads North over land. New York City could face heavy rain and high surf on Tuesday.



5 CorpNet Update, Friday Morning, 11:30 AM

Correspondence from WATCH COMMAND:

****UPDATE** HURRICANE CHESTER IS NOW A CATEGORY 2 STORM. THIS SYSTEM CURRENTLY POSES NO IMMEDIATE THREAT TO NEW YORK CITY. NYCEM WILL CONTINUE TO MONITOR THE STATUS AND PROGRESS OF HURRICANE CHESTER. LOCATION...18.3N 65.0W ABOUT 400 MI... 643.7 KM E OF THE BAHAMAS MAXIMUM SUSTAINED WINDS...96 MPH...154 KM/H PRESENT MOVEMENT...NE OR 315 DEGREES AT 13 MPH...20 KM/H MINIMUM CENTRAL PRESSURE...997 MB...29.44 INCHES.**

Possible Questions for SECURITY and CRISIS MANAGEMENT

- Are any employees signed up for CorpNet?

Facilitator Notes:

- The CorpNet program is managed by NYC Emergency Management and provides business partners with current, accurate information about emergencies to enhance awareness and aid decision making, should their businesses be affected. Businesses can enroll at [PrivateSector.NYC](https://www.nyc.gov/privatesector).

Pre-Storm: 96 HOURS – 48 HOURS

Possible Questions for ALL

- Realistically, how much weight should be given to this weather report? Do you believe it? Is somebody at your organization responsible for watching the weather and maintaining situational awareness?
- Where does the organization get information from?
- Do you have a plan in place for how to deal with emergency events for which you have advance warning?
- What actions, if any, will you take at this point in preparation for the storm?

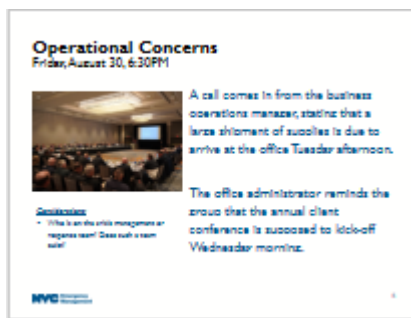
- Does your organization take any general preparedness measures during hurricane season even when a storm is not threatening New York?
- Who at your organization is responsible for triggering a response to the hurricane? If that person is on vacation or unavailable, who else can start the response?

Possible Questions for CRISIS MANAGEMENT and IT

- Will any of your operations be affected by significant heavy rain or surf?
- Would you be able to contact your vendors from outside of your facility? Would you be able to contact them on a Sunday or a holiday?
- What operations might you need to cancel or postpone?

Possible Questions for HUMAN RESOURCES

- Do you want to get a message out to your employees at this point?
- Do you know which of your employees are in town on any given weekend? Is it important for you to know?
- Could you call employees in on a holiday if you needed to do so?



6 Operational Concerns, Friday Evening, 6:30 PM

A call comes in from the business operations manager, stating that a large shipment of supplies is due to arrive at the office Tuesday afternoon.

The office administrator reminds the group that the annual client conference is supposed to kick-off Wednesday morning.

Possible Questions for SUPPLY CHAIN MANAGEMENT and CRISIS MANAGEMENT

- Who is on the crisis management or response team? Does such a team exist?
- What are your organization's dependencies? What or who do you rely on to complete your critical operations? What are they doing to prepare for the approaching storm?

Possible Questions for IT, SUPPLY CHAIN MANAGEMENT, and CRISIS MANAGEMENT

- Do you know if your suppliers and vendors (including telephone service, internet provider, teleconferencing provider, and other technological support providers) are prepared for emergency situations? Will they be there when you need them? Do you have alternates in the event that one of your providers fails?
- Do you have a vendor/supplier contact list that you can access remotely if you need to use it?
- Are you able to contact these providers in the event of an emergency? At any time of day?

Possible Questions for ALL and CRISIS MANAGEMENT

- Do you expect to still host the annual client conference? Will you be able to communicate a message about any change to employees?
- Do you and your employees have access to business email from off-site?
- Will you have any other responsibilities to your business during the storm or on Wednesday (the day after the storm)?



7 SATURDAY



8 Projections Change, Saturday Morning, 9:15 AM

The National Weather Service (NWS) has now indicated that Hurricane Chester is expected to make landfall in North Carolina as a Category 2 storm and will then likely head North-Northeast back into the Atlantic and up the coast.

The meteorologist warns that unusually warm ocean temperatures could keep the hurricane at Category 2 strength when it lands in New York City with a North trajectory.



9 NYC Press Conference, Saturday Morning, 11:00 AM

NYCEM Emergency Operations Center is activated. NYC is considering issuing an evacuation order for Zones 1 and 2. The City is also urging New Yorkers to stay with friends and family if possible, but will open shelters once an evacuation order is issued. The City has been working with hospitals and long-term care providers to relocate their patients and residents. The NWS has issued an official Hurricane Watch for the NYC area.

Facilitator Notes:

- Managers have to simultaneously consider their own concerns and fears as well as how to direct and lead their employees during emergencies.

- Participants should consider where they are getting information from. Some expected sources include notification systems, news outlets, social media, and upper management. Are these sources vetted and how does information get passed along in your organization?
- Participants should consider the preparedness level of their own household. Do they have an emergency plan for family members and pets? Do they have a go-bag?



10 Evacuation: Know Your Zone

Are any of the organization's facilities located in either Evacuation Zone 1 or 2?

Do any employees live in a NYC, NJ, or Long Island evacuation zone?

HINT: www.nyc.gov/knowyourzone

Possible Questions for CRISIS MANAGEMENT

- How does the NWS forecast change your posture in regard to the storm?
- Is your business/organization in a flood zone? An evacuation zone? What's the difference?

Possible Question for ALL

- Is your home in a flood zone? Who around the table will need to evacuate? Where will you evacuate to? How will the need to evacuate or prepare your home and your family for the storm affect your ability to prepare your business?



11 The Next Sandy? Saturday Evening, 6:00 PM

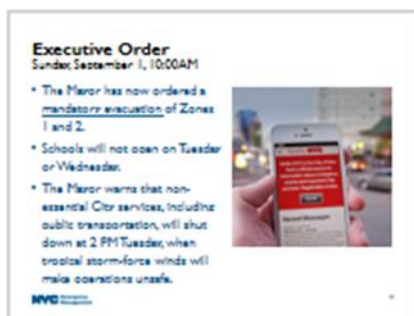
Local media has picked up the Hurricane Chester story.

Commentators are asking whether it will be the next Sandy. Several co-workers have e-mailed asking whether they should plan to come in to work on Tuesday or Wednesday.

The NWS has issued an official Hurricane Warning for New York City and Long Island. The hurricane is expected to make landfall at 8:00 PM, Tuesday and is projected to have a major impact on Brooklyn, southern Queens, and Nassau County.



12 SUNDAY



13 Executive Order, Sunday Morning, 10:00 AM

The Mayor has now ordered a mandatory evacuation of Zones 1 and 2. Schools will not open on Tuesday or Wednesday. The Mayor warns that non-essential City services, including public transportation, will shut down at 2 PM Tuesday, when tropical storm-force winds will make operations unsafe.

Facilitator Notes:

- Notify NYC is the City of New York's official source for information about emergency events and important City services. Alerts from Notify NYC comes directly from NYC Emergency Management's 24/7 Watch Command, which monitors emergency activity in NYC and the metropolitan area. Participants can sign up at [NYC.gov/notifynyc](https://nyc.gov/notifynyc).

Pre-Storm: 48 HOURS – 0 HOUR

Possible Questions for ALL and CRISIS MANAGEMENT

- What operations might you need to cancel or postpone?
- Who is on your crisis management or response team? Do you have such a team? Would these people be able to come to your office on a holiday? If not, could they fulfill their obligations from a remote location?
- If members of your response team are entirely unable to work, who will fill in for them?
- Is there an employee responsible for following the Mayor's Press Conference and other City Hall correspondences related to the storm?

Possible Questions for IT, MANAGEMENT, and CRISIS MANAGEMENT

- Can you physically prepare your facility for a major storm with little warning? On a holiday? Do you know which equipment needs to be protected and how it can be protected?
- What critical operations do you need to get back up and running as soon as the storm passes?

- Do you have an alternate work site? How quickly can you make it functional for your organization's needs?

Possible Questions for HUMAN RESOURCES and CRISIS MANAGEMENT

- Should you send a message to all of your employees? What should this message say?

Possible Questions for FINANCE/ADMINISTRATION and CRISIS MANAGEMENT

- Will you call your insurance agent before the event to discuss how the recovery process will work?



14 Are You Ready?

Is your home in a flood zone? Where will you evacuate to?
Do you have an emergency plan for family members and pets?
Do you have a Go-Bag?

All New Yorkers should sign up for *NotifyNYC* to receive up-to-date emergency alerts directly from NYCEM's 24/7 Watch Command.



15 Are We Ready For This? Monday Morning, 8:30 AM

The COO calls from South Carolina: "Are we ready for this storm? I know folks are out of town for Labor Day, but can you gather some people together to make sure our organization can make it through Chester intact? I don't mean just facilities... Come to think of it, did we ever secure an alternate work site?"

The company's vendor emails back: the shipment of supplies is postponed until further notice.

Possible Questions for CRISIS MANAGEMENT

- Who will conduct the final sweep of the facility? Does this person know what to check for?
- Are your employees cross-trained to maintain critical operations?
- Do you have lines of succession and back-ups designated for important positions?
- Can you help employees without power or without necessary services in any way? Should this be part of your role as an employer?
- How will continued employee absenteeism affect your operations?
- How will the loss of a large share of clients (even if it is only temporary) affect your ability to do business?

Possible Questions for HUMAN RESOURCES and CRISIS MANAGEMENT

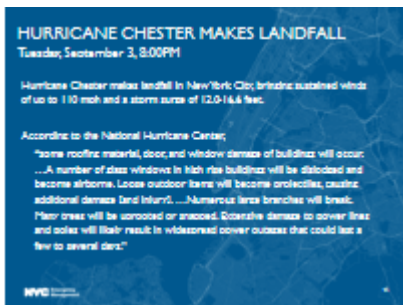
- If you have not contacted all of your employees yet, do you want to do so now? What will you tell them?
- Who is responsible for sending out this type of message to employees? Is this person/are these people able to contact all of your employees from outside of your facility?
- Do you know which of your employees will be affected by the evacuation order? Who around the table would honestly be able to work on securing the business on Tuesday and still be able to safely evacuate with their families in time?

Possible Questions for EMPLOYEE SAFETY and CRISIS MANAGEMENT

- If your business is not in an evacuation zone, is there a place in your facility where people could safely and comfortably shelter-in-place? If so, is it stocked with all of the necessary supplies?
- Do your employees have go-bags?

Possible Questions for HUMAN RESOURCES, MANAGEMENT and LEGAL

- Should your employees come to work this week?
 - If not, should they use vacation time? Sick time?
 - Will they be compensated if your office is closed?
 - If you do not specifically close your office and your employees come to work voluntarily, are you liable if they get injured?



16 Hurricane Chester Makes Landfall, Tuesday Night, 8:00 PM

Hurricane Chester makes landfall in New York City, bringing sustained winds of up to 110 mph and a storm surge of 13.0-16.6 feet.

According to the National Hurricane Center, “some roofing material, door, and window damage of buildings will occur. ...A number of glass windows in high rise buildings will be dislodged and become airborne. Loose outdoor items will become projectiles, causing additional damage [and injury]. ...Numerous large branches will break. Many trees will be uprooted or snapped. Extensive damage to power lines and poles will likely result in widespread power outages that could last a few to several days.”

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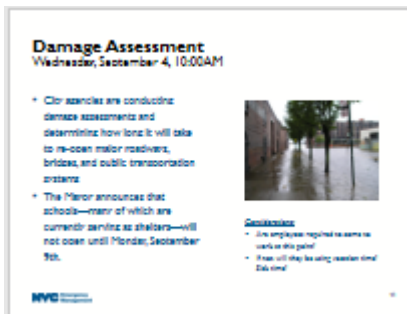
Facilitator Notes:

- Landfall is also referred to as “zero hour”, the term used to indicate the time in which tropical force winds begin to affect the area.



17 The Immediate Aftermath, Wednesday Morning, 8:00 AM

Hurricane Chester has passed and left a large amount of damage in its wake. The storm surge has devastated areas of southern Brooklyn and Queens, trees and signs are down all over the city, and Lower Manhattan and Midtown are a mess of broken glass and debris. Due to flooding, parts of the Belt Pkwy and FDR Drive are closed until further notice.



18 Damage Assessment, Wednesday Morning, 10:00 AM

City agencies are conducting damage assessments and determining how long it will take to re-open major roadways, bridges, and public transportation systems

The Mayor announces that schools—many of which are currently serving as shelters—will not open until Monday, September 9th.

Post LANDFALL

Possible Questions for CRISIS MANAGEMENT

- What critical operations do you need to get back up and running as soon as the storm passes? What operations can be postponed or canceled for a time?
- What information will you want to have in front of you on Thursday during the call? Assuming that you won't have access to your facility on Wednesday, will you be able to get this information?

Possible Questions for IT, MANAGEMENT, and CRISIS MANAGEMENT

- Will you attempt to get in touch with employees at all after the storm?
- Do you have policies in place permitting employees to work from home? If so, will your employees actually be able to work from home? Have you tested the technology? Have employees ever practiced working from home in non-emergency situations to ensure that everything functions properly? Can your network withstand the increased traffic from multiple employees working from home?

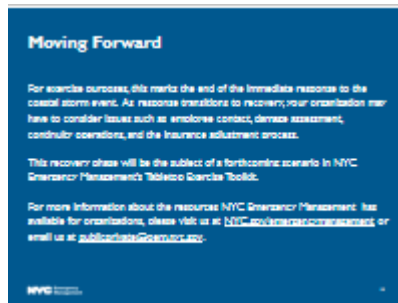
Possible Questions for HUMAN RESOURCES and CRISIS MANAGEMENT

- Are employees required to come to work at this point?
- If not, will they be using vacation time? Sick time?
- What will your policy be regarding employees who must take off from work for personal reasons? Will they be compensated? If so, how? How long will they be able to stay on leave?

- Who is responsible for sending out this type of message to employees? Is this person/are these people able to contact all of your employees from outside of your facility? Are you worried about the missing employees? How can you try to get in touch with them?

Possible Questions for HUMAN RESOURCES, MANAGEMENT, and CRISIS MANAGEMENT

- What will you tell your employees about working for the rest of the day? For tomorrow?
- Can you get in touch with all employees? When you do get in touch with them, what will you tell them?



19 Moving Forward

For exercise purposes, this marks the end of the immediate response to the coastal storm event. As response transitions to recovery, your organization may have to consider issues such as employee contact, damage assessment, continuity operations, and the insurance adjustment process. The recovery phase will be the subject of a forthcoming scenario in NYC Emergency Management's Tabletop Exercise Toolkit.



20 THANK YOU