

EMERGENCY EXERCISE SCHEDULING GUIDANCE

Purpose

- This guide supports building and facility teams to plan and schedule exercises in a way that is practical, proportionate and sustainable over time. It promotes a balanced approach, combining simple activities with more structured exercises to support ongoing preparedness.
- The aim is to move beyond ad hoc or compliance-based activities towards consistent, scenario-based testing. Exercises should focus on what is most relevant to each site and be achievable within available time and resources.
- Programs should test key capabilities such as tenant engagement, communication, coordination, and response to non-routine scenarios, using a mix of discussion-based and practical exercises rather than relying solely on annual evacuation drills.

Reference Note

The Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience (AIDR) Handbook 3: Managing Exercises, which provides the recognised Australian framework for the planning and conduct of exercises, has been considered in the development of this template.

Who Should Use This Guide:

This guide is intended for personnel responsible for planning, coordinating or overseeing emergency exercising activities and preparedness programs across building or operational environments.

Typical users may include:

- Building managers
- Security managers or supervisors
- Emergency planning and preparedness personnel
- Facilities or operations personnel
- Risk, resilience or business continuity personnel
- Exercise coordinators

Instruction Notes

- Use this guide to plan exercises across the year for your building or site. Start by thinking about the main risks and scenarios that are most relevant to your team. Then choose exercises that help test the effectiveness of emergency procedures, communication pathways and coordination arrangements.
- Use the guide to schedule a mix of exercise types, from simple discussions through to more practical activities. Spread exercises across the year so they are realistic, useful and manageable.
- Use the planning table to map out when exercises will happen, what they will test and who should be involved. After each exercise, review what was learned and use this to update future scheduling.

Scheduling Principles

- Prioritise scenarios that are the most relevant to the building, its risks and operating context, while using a wide range of scenarios that allow different capabilities to be tested as well as demonstrate how situational awareness is established, maintained and updated over time.
- Consider inclusion and accessibility when planning exercises, including how scenarios and communication will support people who may require additional assistance.
- Avoid relying solely on annual evacuation drills as the primary form of testing.
- Use insights from incidents, exercises and hazard planning to inform scenario selection.
- Involve the right participants for each exercise, including building management, security, wardens, tenants, contractors and, where relevant, neighbouring buildings and emergency services.
- Plan activities so they are achievable within available time and resources and spread them across the year.
- Start with discussion-based or desktop exercises when introducing new or emerging scenarios.
- Use more complex or functional exercises to test coordination, systems and response under time pressure.
- Increase the complexity of exercises over time as capability develops. *Exercise scheduling should be informed by previous lessons learned, identified capability gaps and outstanding corrective actions.*

Exercises should feed into debriefs, lessons learned and corrective action tracking to support continuous improvement.

This table provides a general guide to the type and frequency of exercises that support ongoing preparedness. It is not intended to be prescriptive. Exercise programs should be tailored to the site, focusing on relevant risks, capability gaps and available resources.

RECOMMENDED EXERCISE FREQUENCY			
Exercise Type	Purpose	Suggested Frequency	Typical Duration
Discussion-based (short, low-prep conversations about roles, triggers, and expectations)	Talk through roles, activation triggers, escalation pathways or communication processes.	1-2 per year	30 mins to 1 hour
Desktop/Tabletop (facilitated scenario walkthrough with timeline, injects, decisions, and outcomes)	Step through a realistic scenario with timeline decisions and injects.	1 per year	3 to 4 hours
Functional	Test coordination, systems, communications and real-time response	Annually or every 1-2 years depending on site complexity.	4 hours to full day
Evacuation drills	Test evacuation procedures and compliance requirement.	Annually, as required by Australian Standard 3745 – 2010 (Planning for Emergencies in Facilities'), with additional drills conducted on an as needs basis-based on-site risk.	Varies

Use this planner to schedule exercises across the year based on priority risks, capability gaps and recent learnings. Select scenarios and exercise types that are relevant to the site and ensure activities are practical and achievable within available time and resources.

ANNUAL EXERCISE PLANNER						
Planned Timing	Scenario	Exercise Type	Capability Area (e.g. Tenant Engagement, Systems, etc.)	Reason for Conducting the Exercise (e.g. Recent Incident, Previous Exercise Gap, Seasonal Climate Risk, etc.)	Participants	Notes

Consider balancing the annual plan across different capability areas such as communication, coordination, systems and processes, and tenant engagement.