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**JOINT EXERCISE FOR CERT PERSONNEL  
FROM HO-HO-KUS, NJ AND MAHWAH, NJ  
(This article was prepared by  
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**Overview**

The CERT units of the Borough of Ho-Ho-Kus, New Jersey and the Borough of Mahwah, NJ conducted a joint exercise on Saturday, April 26, 2008 (Operation Teamwork) and the evening of Tuesday, May 6, 2008 (Operation Teamwork II) in the Borough of Ho-Ho-Kus. The scenarios of the exercise were designed to simulate emergency responses primarily by CERT personnel to numerous terrorist and search and rescue incidents during daytime and nighttime conditions in a heavily wooded area and in a separate marshland. The scenario was based on the lack of emergency services professionals who were deployed at other incidents and therefore, the primary responders needed to be CERT personnel from Ho-Ho-Kus and Mahwah. To make this exercise more realistic, only a limited number of professional emergency services personnel and agencies from both Ho-Ho-Kus and Mahwah participated. Overall, the exercise consisted of multi-jurisdiction, multi-agency, multi-location events held on two different days and times covering scenarios under both daytime and nighttime conditions.

The actual numbers of participants (107) and their respective disciplines were as follows: 62 CERT members; 25 professional emergency personnel; 14 "victims"; and six media and elected officials. The Borough of Ho-Ho-Kus maintains a detailed roster for the specific entities and their respective personnel participating in this exercise. Additionally, there were 28 events including light search and rescue; hazardous materials; cribbing; live "victims" and mass casualty triage; satellite debris; downed electric wires; dummies; etc. covered in the day and night exercises with 14 resources such as a thermal imaging camera; CERT trailer; communications vans; etc. utilized in support.

Immediately following this exercise, a short debriefing was conducted with the exercise participants, controllers, and evaluators and each participant was given an emergency aid pocket card for future reference. In addition, all after action observations from the exercise design team members and exercise

evaluators were reviewed by the local OEM organizations. All comments, suggestions and observations, both problematic and successful, have been consolidated into an after action report distributed to officials in both municipalities, and county and state OEM personnel.

### **Summarized Details**

First, all Borough personnel, Local Emergency Management Council (LEMC), local media, and residents were notified of the training exercises in advance by the Ho-Ho-Kus Mayor's newsletter and the Borough's telephone emergency notification services as well as having a Mobile Message Trailer on the main road of the incident sites to warn drivers of the conduct of the exercise. Signs were posted by local law enforcement personnel prior to the exercise as well. The exercise personnel all were on-time and the exercise, starting as scheduled, allowed the CERT personnel to put into practice actions and ideas that they were trained for, in realistic, on the ground scenarios. A detailed, pre-exercise, Admin and Safety briefing was conducted. Additionally, all personnel were provided an opportunity to view geographic maps of each site and ask appropriate questions during the respective incident briefings. Some thought was later given to providing all participants a copy of the maps of the respective incident area in any future exercise or incident. Local LEMC personnel were advised and approved of the exercise as well as those officials in Mahwah prior to the planning. Two Councilmen from Ho-Ho-Kus were present and both the Mayor and the Council President from Mahwah. All activities were coordinated by the exercise planners through the appropriate authorities of both jurisdictions.

Second, Incident Command System was utilized through out both exercises and appropriate vests were worn by the two ICs, PIO, Logistics Officer, Medical Officer, and Safety Officers. There was an Area Command Post co-located with ICP One at one scene of the exercise which coordinated the two ICPs—one at each separate geographic incident site. More training in communication skills and some better position descriptions could improve the ICS operation. Furthermore, radio communications appears to have a need for improvement through better equipment and radio-telephone procedure training. Cell-phones were used to contact outside personnel during a pseudo-emergency that occurred.

Third, the Ho-Ho-Kus Volunteer Fire Department used one of its Thermal Imaging Cameras for both exercises and the Mahwah OEM brought a Mobile Communications, Command and Control Van as well as an Emergency light tower—the latter for use in the night operations. During this exercise, a bus was supplied from the County OEM/PD to transport personnel between exercise sites. Additionally, strict personnel accountability was emphasized throughout the conduct of the exercise to include during the use of the transportation from incident site to incident site.

Fourth, it was essential that any public information be coordinated through the incident command staff to avoid the release of conflicting, erroneous, or misleading information. A PIO was utilized throughout all exercises and controlled all media personnel, questions, interviews, and several timely press releases. Local law enforcement was notified of all pre- and post-exercise

activities to preclude/minimize personnel fears from calls about “abnormal” activities in the areas and roadways. In fact, at the end of the day exercise, the local police were called by a passerby in a vehicle because he saw a pickup truck (ours fortunately) drop-off a black 55-gal drum in the woods!

Fifth, Emergency Medical Services personnel were on site with their rigs and some of their personnel acted as victims to critique the participants immediately on their remedial actions at a particular incident. Each incident site had its own Safety Officer who went with the participants throughout the exercise course. Portable toilets were provided on both sites for the benefit of all personnel. Tarps were provided for all victims as groundcovers, so that they would be less apt to get ticks, dampness, etc. Group Supervisors and Safety Officers were provided with emergency beacons for use in a real emergency on the exercise course. There were no real emergency incidents requiring medical aid during the entire day/night exercise through woods and marshlands. Local Police and Fire personnel were on site and involved in the preparation, planning, conduct, and supervision of the exercise. Police patrolled the area perimeters to insure the safety of participants to include setting up warning signs, flashing lights, etc. on the local roadways. Animal Control personnel went through the woodlands prior to the exercise to insure that there was no wildlife danger to the participants during both day and night operations.

Sixth, while the Borough of Ho-Ho-Kus does have adequate emergency back up power to support sheltering operations for the primary shelter, we did not have the need to use our CERT personnel to open a shelter for this exercise or access the Borough’s emergency backup system. The Ho-Ho-Kus CERT trailer has several portable generators, two of which were used during the exercises, and the primary CERT unit, a portable, 15kw generator, remained on stand-by.

Finally, all corrective measures noted in the after action report were reviewed at our Borough LEMC meeting. The detailed After Action Report was prepared by the Ho-Ho-Kus CERT Program Mgr and distributed to the Ho-Ho-Kus LEMC, Mayor & Council, Bergen County OEM, Mahwah OEM and Mahwah CERT Program Coordinator.

In conclusion, the major comment from the CERT personnel was that they really enjoyed the new and challenging opportunities presented to them during both the day and night time exercises. While we hope never to have to use some of what we practiced and what incidents were encountered, we are all better prepared and more confident if called upon to support our trained professionals. Although we put much knowledge into practice in these real-life situations, we know that we have more to learn and need to sharpen our skills. However, that is why we do the exercises in the first place.

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