

SIMTEC NEWSLETTER

Greetings!

Finally we have some sunshine in Metro Vancouver! I hope that you are finding sunshine to overcome any “Winter Blues!”

Since our last Newsletter in March, we have been very busy. Further development of the exercise has been an interesting challenge in terms of development and content. Typically, when a community wants to run an emergency exercise, they begin by identifying the exercise scope. This includes the hazard they want to explore, the personnel that need to be involved, and the types of functions and activities that should be exercised. A Lead Designer is then appointed who will develop objectives, a scenario, and evaluation criteria. When the exercise runs, participants have the opportunity to practice their response in a manner that reinforces their training and validates their emergency plans. In British Columbia, for example, all communities must use the British Columbia Emergency Response Management System (BCERMS). Response coordination at the site level, at the EOC level, and at the regional and provincial level is based on an adapted Incident Command System.

In this case, we are designing an exercise for communities across Canada and internationally who may not be using this kind of response management system. So, how do you develop an exercise when the exercise has to be generic enough to be adaptable to be used no matter what system is in place, no matter what training senior decision makers have received and no matter what the community’s plan may or may not have in place? Quite a challenge!

Add to this that we are now introducing the research component into the exercise design. Typically, those charged with the development of an exercise don’t conduct research. Yes, they may look at what has

happened in other exercises with similar scenarios (or in real events) and to review the results of past exercises; but they don’t conduct independent research and incorporate that work into the exercises design.

Those are the demands we have had of our exercise development team and both Darren Blackburn and Bob Walker have risen to the challenge! We had, as you would expect, several meetings to determine the scenario – we wanted something that could apply across Canada and would also be applicable to other countries and we were fortunate that our Expert Working Group came up with some great choices for us – thus our choice of extreme winter weather. We also decided that we would use the JIBC’s “simulation” community: Denton (a community based on a population of 50,000 with river frontage). So far, nothing unusual about that.

Darren came back with a preliminary “Master Sequence of Events List” and now the research team stepped in. Our literature review identified numerous key stressors for response personnel – some that were applicable at the site level, some that were applicable at the EOC level and some generic response-based stressors. As the research team worked with Darren, it was important to include these stressors into the exercise so that we could see how the exercise participants would respond to and/or deal with these stressors. We had to be creative and to spread the stressors across the various organizations that would be represented at the EOC (e.g., police, fire).

We were also interested in how decisions got made within the EOC setting. That meant that we had to evaluate all of the exercise inputs/injects to determine if they were an “information only” input or whether or not it was a “decision making” input. If we were intending people to make a decision, what did we want

to know about the response? This piece of upfront work was critical to the development of our research.

Once this was done, then Bob worked with Darren to bring the inputs into the exercise in a meaningful, realistic way – through the use of immersive multi-media video and audio injects as well as digital print injects (e.g., a fax or news release). Meanwhile the research team had to develop and refine the code book – when a certain stressor was introduced into the exercise what was the response? When a decision was made, how was it made? All of the possibilities had to be considered so that we would be able to code the transcripts and audio-visual material to complete our analysis.

As well, our analysis of the exercises is informing us in the development of our training program (it will be shown prior to the final exercise). What key behaviours are we wanting to change via this first exercise? Our expectation is that if we identify actual behaviour that did not follow an informed practice approach (based on the exercise scenario) and then demonstrate a different approach in the training, exercise participants will change their behaviour and/or how they make decisions. Thus, the training program will be developed over the summer, following our analysis, reviewed and then used on October 29, 2012 at our final exercise run.

Our process has worked well for us and we learned a lot about how to integrate research into exercise development to address issues beyond the usual “was the plan followed” or “did such and such person respond appropriately?” As could be expected we made many changes after the pilot and the test exercise. Now we are in the final run – enhancing the exercise to address what didn’t work so well, supporting what did work well and restructuring to make certain decision points (for example) more explicit. Our focus groups and individual interviews really contributed towards

helping both the research and exercise development teams in understanding what needed to be addressed.

One of the things we heard repeatedly from our exercise participants was that we needed to include the stress of radio chatter and to be responsive to questions that the exercise participants might have (e.g., what is the status at 4500 Main Street?). So, how to do this without having a bank of controllers available? Once the exercise is posted on the Collaboratory any community in the world will be able to download and “play” the exercise using EXPOD; there will not be a bank of controllers managing things behind the scene. Thus the exercise has to stand alone in terms of its delivery while also providing opportunities for communities to have their own exercise staff include local issues.

In the last exercise, based on the previous feedback we received, we provided a background audio of phones ringing, office chatter/noises. That helped to enhance the realism, but didn’t really address the challenge of introducing the feedback loops. This is a major challenge, which we are still working on – but we think we have a solution by reviewing our data logs as to when information was requested (looking for an average time across the exercise pods) and automatically building in the feedback into the audio track. Let us know if you have other ideas.

We also have learned a lot in terms of how to use NVivo 9 and adapting to the challenges and opportunities of using this software. Some things we thought we would find useful, in the end haven’t been so useful, other things we didn’t think we would use turned out to be very useful. We had some technical glitches to iron out regarding using a networked computer and ensuring that our data files remained secured. There were many calls into JIBC’s IT department to help us resolve our issues! We also found that adding in the participant attributes (e.g., age, gender) wasn’t quite as easy as we

thought and required a number of consultations with NVivo staff and researchers.

Next Steps

Our coding is complete, we are adding in the attributes to the data and have begun on the initial analysis – will be ready to report out next edition of the newsletter. Refinements to the exercise will take place in June and July and the training component will be developed in September. As well, we continue to press forward on our literature review re: decontamination.

How Can YOU Help?

We have started our literature review on decontamination protocols and psychosocial considerations. Many thanks to Colin Tansley for his great contributions – we are specifically looking for articles (peer-reviewed or in the grey literature) around decontamination procedures involving:

- women who are pregnant or breast-feeding;
- persons who are blind or hearing impaired;
- persons with physical disabilities; and
- persons with amputations or disfigurement.

If you feel that this is an area where you can assist us please let us know. Links to, or articles about, psychosocial considerations for decontamination protocols are of keen interest to us.

Don't forget - we welcome contributions to our Newsletter and website. Enjoy the summer!

Laurie Pearce
SIMTEC Research Chair



Book This Date!

Our EWG will reconvene on **October 30th 2012** for its annual meeting to review the project's progress to date as well as the next steps in the research. By this time we will have run the final Psychosocial Exercise and will be looking for your comments and suggestions to help finalize the training and exercise for posting to our Collaboratory in December 2012.

The Project Review Committee (PRC) will convene on October 31st 2012. The PRC will review the project's progress, evaluate the financial status and discuss any recommended changes to the project Charter.

Co-Principal Investigator Profiles

Colleen Vaughan, M.Ed.
Director, Emergency Management Division



Colleen Vaughan M.Ed. is the Director for the Emergency Management Division within the School of Justice and Public Safety at the Justice Institute of British Columbia. In this role she is responsible for program/curriculum development and delivery including certificates, diplomas and degrees as well as research initiatives for the Division. She oversees a Certificate in Emergency Management; a Certificate in Exercise Design; a Bachelor of Emergency and Security Studies; contract and tuition offerings in Emergency Management and ICS; the development and delivery of Emergency Management, Search and Rescue (SAR) and Emergency Social Services (ESS) training for Emergency Management British Columbia (EMBC); and Emergency Management training for the health sector in B.C. In addition to her educational role, Colleen has been involved in emergency and disaster responses throughout British Columbia and the State of Georgia. Colleen holds a Bachelor of Commerce and a Master of

Education from the University of British Columbia. She has been honored as the recipient of the Justice Institute of British Columbia Instructor of the Year Award, and the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development Excellence Award for teaching from the University of Texas.

Colleen’s involvement with SIMTEC is primarily around the development of the exercises and training materials. Working closely with two of her staff: Darren Blackburn and Bob Walker, Colleen is enjoying this opportunity to integrate research with practice.

Robin S. Cox, PhD

Program Director, Associate Professor, Disaster and Emergency Management Program, Faculty of Social and Applied Sciences, Royal Roads University



Robin has a PhD in Counselling Psychology with specialized training and professional experience in disaster psychosocial and trauma response, critical incident stress management, and conflict management. She is an active researcher and author with a specialized focus on community disaster resilience; the psychological, social, and behavioral health (psychosocial) dimensions of disasters; and community engagement in disaster and emergency management planning. Her current research projects include a focus on community disaster resilience, strategies for supporting the integration of psychosocial considerations in disaster planning and response, and community engagement in disaster and pandemic planning.

Robin is also an active member of the Canadian disaster planning response community, contributing to the development of a number of planning and policy documents including the Psychosocial Annex for the Canadian Pandemic Plan. She has responded as a psychosocial support volunteer in a wide range of

disasters and sits as a member of the organizing committee of the B.C. Provincial Health Services Authority's Disaster Psychosocial Services network.

Funding Partners

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Project Partner

We also like to acknowledge the support of Royal Roads University.



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