

Exercise **Target Red**

Executive Summary



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<http://simtec.jibc.ca>



Introduction

Exercise Target Red is the third of five planned exercises conducted over a four year period to study the psychosocial factors involved in the decisions and actions performed during a disaster by responders over a number of scenarios. Psychosocial refers to the interaction between one's mind and body; in practical terms, the term refers to one's physical, psychological and social functioning.

The Simulation Training and Exercise and Collaboratory (SIMTEC) is a significant research project undertaken through the Office of Applied Research and the Emergency Management Division at the Justice Institute of BC (JIBC), Canada. Funding for this project is provided by the Canadian Safety and Security Program, Centre for Security Science, Defence Research and Development Canada; championed by Employee Assistance Services, Specialized Health Services Directorate RAPB/BRP Health Canada (EAS-HC); and conducted by JIBC and Royal Roads University.

Three primary research questions guide the SIMTEC project:

1. What resources and training do Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) personnel need to respond more effectively to the psychosocial consequences of disasters?
2. What resources and training would assist first responders, family physicians and other psychosocial practitioners to respond to the psychosocial consequences of disasters?
3. How can the knowledge and resources developed through this research most effectively be made available to EOC personnel, first responders, psychosocial practitioners, researchers and community members around the world?

SIMTEC is a “collaboratory”, or virtual laboratory of information, research, and expert dialogue focused on providing training and exercises for emergency responders in Emergency Operations Centres (EOC) and other senior decision makers with a specific emphasis on the psychosocial implications. This collaboratory includes a digital library of exercises, injects, scenarios, simulated news footage, and exercise manuals which serve as a central repository and evolving compendium of resources for training and research available on the internet, free of charge to any jurisdiction with access to high- speed internet. The protocols and guidelines will be of interest and applicable to any country.



Exercise Target Red

Exercise Target Red is an immersive tabletop exercise, intended to validate the participants' ability to complete common tasks at an Incident Command Post (ICP) during an active shooter incident and a local EOC. Additionally, the exercise prompts participants to consider the psychosocial impacts on first responders, casualties, their family and friends, and the broader community as the ICP is faced with managing a number of challenging and traumatic events.

The aim of **Exercise Target Red** was the development of a collaborative protocol, which engages both police and psychosocial personnel. The exercise focuses on reducing anxiety, avoiding contamination of evidence/witness statements, and provides police officers with opportunities to receive better structured, more coherent and valuable information from casualties and witnesses during a Multi-casualty Incident (MCI). By definition, MCIs involve multiple casualties, often include deaths and injuries, and are traumatic for casualties, their families and friends, and the responders themselves. When the MCI is based on criminal activities, the area becomes a crime scene and all those involved in the MCI become potential witnesses and may also include the perpetrators of the MCI.

The exercise was designed with two purposes in mind:

1. To serve as an opportunity to exercise a potentially real scenario involving an active shooter and mass casualties.
2. To deliberately include inputs of psychosocial stressors.

The exercise scenario focuses on an active shooter incident impacting the fictional town of Denton. At the start of the exercise players are informed they are now employees of the City of Denton, representing whichever agency they work for in the “real world.” For example, a “real” police officer would be acting in the role of a Denton police officer. As the exercise begins, players receive notification that shots have been fired at one of the city-owned sports centres. They are informed that an Incident Command Post is being established, the Denton EOC is activated in anticipation of providing support to first responders, and that the local hospital is receiving information about the event. As the exercise unfolds, players are confronted with a number of situations in which they must decide how to respond (e.g., management of victims emerging from the arena, family members arriving on scene). In each case, players rely on their training, experience, and plans to decide the most appropriate course of action. It is important to note that participants are not involved in any tactical responses dealing with the actual crime but rather managing those outside of the inner perimeter and the psychosocial implications.



Development of **Exercise Target Red** began in March 2013 with a preliminary literature review, followed by a further review that explored key psychosocial interventions aimed at reducing anxiety and trauma in those persons affected by a traumatic incident. The literature review focused on how to address the psychosocial effects of being involved in a mass casualty incident, and more specifically, on how police services and other related agencies can address the psychosocial concerns among casualties and other secondary victims (e.g., family and friends) while ensuring the investigation remains reliable. Semi-structured interviews were then conducted by telephone and face-to-face with 31 first responders, first receivers, other responders, media, and Subject Matter Experts (SME). These interviews supplemented the literature review in order to gain perspective from those with direct involvement in a MCI and experience with the current systems of support.

An Expert Working Group (EWG) was convened in March 2014 to provide support and feedback in the development of the exercise scenario, the accompanying training video, and the proposed protocol for addressing the psychosocial impacts of a MCI. The EWG helped ensure the realism of the storyline and that the exercise objectives could be met through the scenarios and tasks provided. The content of the training exercise was based on the findings from the literature review and interviews, with the EWG providing realistic scenarios to provide participants with practice in handling an MCI in a way that more effectively addresses psychosocial needs of victims, witnesses, fellow first responders, and other members of the community affected by the emergency.

Tabletop Exercise

The training exercise, a three hour tabletop exercise, was run on June 11, 2014 via Praxis simulation and was audio and video recorded. Praxis provides an immersive, interactive first-person perspective of an unfolding scenario or event. Critical thinking is required, as learners apply theories and lessons learned while encountering challenging decision points.

The exercise was conducted with participants from three local communities – Burnaby, New Westminister, and Port Coquitlam – with each pod also having access to support from BC Ambulance Service. Prior to beginning the exercise, participants were shown a SIMTEC training video created in-house at JIBC. The video was developed based on the literature review, interviews, and conversations with Expert Working Group members and narrated by Retired Deputy Police Chief from New Westminister, Mike Judd. The key points in the training video were designed to parallel the issues participants would encounter in the exercise scenario.

During the exercise, the SIMTEC research team observed the ICP members' ability to devise plans and make decisions to address the psychosocial needs of casualties, their families and



friends, and responders. Following the exercise, focus groups were conducted with the exercise participants. Transcripts of the exercise and follow-up focus groups for each responding pod were coded and thematically analyzed using NVivo Data Analysis Software in order to identify the main challenges and concerns that emerged during an active shooter MCI exercise. Exercise transcripts from each pod were also coded and analyzed. Refinements to the exercise were made based on feedback received from participants post-exercise.

Findings

During the data analysis process for **Exercise Target Red**, the SIMTEC research team identified several common themes that emerged from the exercises:

1. The need to have Victim Assistance Workers on callout as soon as an MCI is identified.
2. A Family Assistance Centre needs to be set up as quickly as possible for the family and friends of those affected by the MCI.
3. The need to develop a strong communications link between the ICP and the Family Assistance Centre to share information from hostages and/or trapped persons who were able to share information with family and friends via phone or social networks.
4. Reunifications between family members and casualties need psychosocial supports in place, especially if casualties are injured.
5. Evidence Contamination was a big concern of the police in regards to getting information from witnesses who were directly involved in the MCI. Viewing the awareness video prior to the exercise and having the opportunity to have discussions with local Crown Counsel are important in understanding the issues.
6. The importance of what First Responders say and do has a major impact on casualties and witnesses.
7. There needs to be consideration of providing opportunities for the reunification of casualties post-event in a Group Support session.
8. First Response Organizations need to provide support to their personnel after an MCI.

The research findings show the importance of providing psychological and social support early on, during, and after a MCI in order to reduce the immediate and long-term emotional responses associated with such an event. By quickly activating emergency social service agencies to facilitate counselling, family reunification, and address the other needs of casualties and their friends and family, the negative after effects of an MCI can be lessened. This can be accomplished by:

- Calming mass-casualty victims and the general public;



- Promoting a sense of safety;
- Providing a sense of connectedness;
- Creating a sense of self and community worth among victims; and
- Providing a sense hope.

In addition, the findings highlight the importance of incident commanders and other emergency management leaders ensuring the well-being of first responders is a top priority and making sure communities have plans for providing ongoing support to casualties that can include reunification of casualties and first responders post-event.

Information collected from the exercise, focus groups, and Subject Matter Expert interviews throughout the research process assisted in the development of training materials and guidelines for psychosocial interventions by ICP personnel, First Responders, Victim Services, and Disaster Psychosocial Services. Training personnel to respond to the psychosocial consequences of disasters will reduce stress levels and enhance strategic and tactical decision-making. The exercises and training protocols are publicly-available through the SIMTEC online collaboratory.

On March 3, 2015, the final web based **Exercise Target Red** was uploaded to the JIBC website, along with the training video and resources, and is now available for access and download from <http://simtec.jibc.ca/node/113>