EMERGENCY RESPONSE PLAN DRILL

# ERP EXERCISE

## TABLETOP EXERCISE – Overdue Aircraft That Evolves into An Aircraft Accident


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# INFORMATION FOR THE DRILL FACILITATOR

## Tableтop Exercises

### Personnel Involved

This exercise usually involves all emergency response team members in a conference room setting. Using an event-specific scenario, supporting documentation, and injected messages simulating field-derived information, the participants discuss required actions while in a controlled training environment. With a facilitator to keep the discussions focused, the outcomes derived from a tabletop exercise may include new policy, plan revisions, and training requirements.

### About the Exercise

A tabletop exercise is a focused practice activity that places the participants together in a common area, and enacting a simulated situation requiring them to function in the capacity expected in a real event. Its purpose is to promote preparedness by acting on policies and plans and thereby training ERP team members. Participants should be able to recognize and prioritize required tasks and use the ERP and associated forms correctly.

Consideration should be given to how events like the current pandemic may affect your emergency response. Can personnel effectively carry out their emergency response duties remotely? As you move through the drill consider if each step can be accomplished in the current environment or if changes are necessary to address the challenges created by the pandemic.

This ERP drill event is a simulation of an overdue aircraft that evolves into an aircraft accident.

The intent is to exercise many different aspects of the operation’s ERP and may also demand enacting other company procedures as the drill progresses. As facilitator, you are the referee for this exercise, so ensure you adequately control the release of information to the participants and take detailed notes to aid in debriefing the results and correcting any plan deficiencies. Schedule this exercise on a day when managers are willing to devote a few hours to fully participate.

This drill is designed to be a tabletop exercise that will evaluate the preparation and response of participating personnel throughout a limited portion of the operation and may also include corporation entities if applicable. It is critical that each interacting member accurately and completely perform or describe their required actions during the tabletop exercise. As facilitator, observe participants carefully and ensure they are documenting and executing as intended in the ERP.

Make sure you as facilitator keep a log; your notes will be used to debrief the exercise, identify problems and evaluate the need for changes in the ERP. Also ensure response team members are documenting all of their actions and external conversations.

Remember the intent of the drill is to train and increase the proficiency of the emergency response team members and also discover any deficiencies in the ERP itself. The end-product should be a better prepared team and an improved or validated ERP.

# PREPARATION

## Phase 1

### Event Details

1. Create a realistic simulated flight manifest and flight plan including the route and weather information for the drill event. Use standard company forms and fill in with realistic info and remember to label “ERP DRILL.” Make sure these forms are available to the team members when they need to retrieve them.

2. Gather the response team into the tabletop exercise area/room or through a video communications platform such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams. Ensure each team member has a copy of the appropriate ERP folders/forms. Provide a brief overview of the purpose of the exercise and answer any questions team members may have. Set the right tone by ensuring team members understand they will be acting through all applicable parts of the ERP. Emphasize that any communication external to the exercise space must be prefaced with “This is an emergency response drill.”

3. In this scenario the individual responsible for operational control is tracking a simulated flight from their home base to XXXX Airport. In this drill, use the scheduler/dispatcher (or similar employee) as the individual who has the responsibility of exercising operational control/flight following. Not only will this drill help shed light on the effectiveness of your company’s operational control over a flight, but it will also reveal how adequate your overdue aircraft procedures are. Look for the scheduler/dispatcher to use all available resources to accomplish necessary tasks in an expeditious manner.

4. REMEMBER TO MAKE SURE ALL PHONE CALLS ARE PREFACED WITH “THIS IS AN EMERGENCY RESPONSE DRILL.” Look for the scheduler/dispatcher to continually maintain a chronological log of each action taken throughout the scenario. This includes who they contacted, and when, and what information has been passed. You will have to decide the appropriate structure for information exchange for your flight department (i.e. are the Chief Pilot and Aviation Director/ Director of Operations going to participate using their personal cell phones or a single dedicated line for the drill?). No matter how you decide to handle communication, the scheduler/dispatcher must look up the real phone numbers for every contact for validation.

5. When the arrival time for the simulated flight approaches, observe the scheduler/dispatcher’s actions as the aircraft exceeds the simulated Estimated Time of Arrival (ETA). The scheduler/dispatcher must discover the aircraft is 45 minutes past the ETA by way of whatever SOP’s you have in place. (For this drill we are using 45 minutes as a benchmark for initiating overdue aircraft procedures; your procedures may differ). The scheduler/dispatcher should continue to monitor the flight status and prepare to initiate overdue aircraft procedures.

# OVERDUE PROCEDURES

## Phase 2

### Operational Control

It is 45 minutes past the ETA for (Example: YOUR REGISTRATION #) and the overdue aircraft procedures should be initiated, depending on your company SOP's for overdue aircraft.

### *Drill Phone Calls*

If possible, set up an exercise phone number (either a cell phone or land line) that you as the facilitator will use to simulate some of the external communication. When a response team member or other individual is required to make a phone call, ensure the number they are calling is vocalized to verify it's correct, then utilize the exercise phone line. All phone conversations should be documented with detailed descriptions of who was called and a brief written summary of the call. If it is necessary for that individual to leave the exercise room to make the call, encourage them to do so.

The scheduler/dispatcher should have the flight plan and manifest information. They should verify the information is correct and make sure any last-minute changes to the flight or manifest were documented.

- The scheduler/dispatcher attempts to contact the crew.
  - There is no response from the crew.

### *The scheduler/dispatcher should consider some possibilities...*

a) **Scenario:** The aircraft may have diverted or been delayed due to weather.
**Action:** Consult the flight plan and find out what alternate airports were filed.

b) **Scenario:** They may have been delayed due to a back-up in the ATC system.
**Action:** Who is the responsible ATC authority for the destination area?

c) **Scenario:** The Sat phone could be inoperative and/or the cell service intermittent.
**Action:** Determine the handler/FBO information and contact them at the destination and alternate airports.

d) **Scenario:** The flight arrived late, the FBO was closed.
**Action:** Determine the hotel and air traffic control tower contact information.

### *The scheduler/dispatcher will begin collecting information.*

- Did the flight depart on time?
  - The scheduler/dispatcher is able to confirm the flight departed on time.

- Was there weather along the route?
  - The scheduler/dispatcher reviews the weather along the route for the time of the flight and determines that weather may have been a factor and may have forced the crew to divert.

- Has anyone seen the aircraft or heard from the crew?
    - The scheduler/dispatcher contacts the FBO or airport manager at both the destination airport and the alternate airport to see if the aircraft has landed.
        - Neither airport can confirm that the aircraft arrived.
    - The scheduler/dispatcher contacts management to notify them of the overdue aircraft and to see if the crew may have contacted management.
        - No one has heard from the crew since the flight departed.
    - The scheduler/dispatcher contacts the maintenance department to see if the pilot contacted them about any issues with the aircraft.
        - The maintenance department verifies there was no known or reported malfunction with the aircraft.
    - The scheduler/dispatcher contacts the hotel.
        - The flight crew has not checked in.

The sense of urgency should be picking up by now and contact with ATC facilities is necessary. Some responses begin to filter in from various sources.

- The DO (or equivalent) calls and verifies there weren't any last-minute changes to the flight plan. The destination airport and designated alternate are still the same.

- The scheduler/dispatcher contacts the control tower at the home base or Flight Service Station (FSS) to find out flight information regarding (YOUR REGISTRATION #). (ATC has the authority to issue an Alert Notice (ALNOT) if the aircraft's status falls under those provisions, upon which time FSS will assist. If in doubt about which controlling ATC agency to contact, contact FSS at 1-800-WX-BRIEF.) The scheduler/dispatcher must be prepared to give the following information:

    - Name of pilot(s):
    - Name of passenger(s). How many?
    - Aircraft registration number "N"
    - Type of aircraft
    - Color of aircraft
    - Last known location and time.
    - Point of takeoff and time.
    - Destination and ETA.
    - Details of the flight plan filed with FAA
    - Fuel duration in hours and minutes.

- Response: ATC/FSS indicates they will call back.

Utilize a company employee and segregate him/her from other company personnel. Provide the following tear out event description. After the employee thoroughly reviews the event description, the employee will call the scheduler/dispatcher pretending to be ATC/FSS with an update. The employee will describe the event details in the reporting phone call.

## SCENARIO

NXXXX requested a diversion to XXXX Airport due to severe weather at their planned destination airport. The aircraft was handed off from Center to Approach Control for XXXX Airport; however, communication with the aircraft was lost shortly after the handoff. The aircraft was deemed missing and search and rescue procedures were initiated. The aircraft was located approximately 13 NM West of XXXX Airport.

This is now the beginning of the emergency response plan execution. Hopefully the call from ATC/FSS was recorded on an initial notification form of some kind. When the event information is received the primary decision maker should be informed and activation of the ERP should follow.

Release the exercise inputs (H+ minutes) at the elapsed time intervals indicated for each one. Controlling the release of information not only improves realism but allows the entire response team to participate as necessary. Avoid providing more information than would be available in a real accident situation.

As facilitator make sure you take thorough notes and document significant observations. At the conclusion of the exercise you will use those notes to evaluate the response team's actions and the ERP itself. Record any stated concerns by the participants which may require revision of the ERP. If appropriate you may want to schedule a follow-on meeting and present the team with a finished summary of the exercise, open items, problems that were identified, and other suggestions.

# ERP DRILL PROCEDURES

## Phase 3

### Exercise Inputs: Timed releases

At the beginning of each phone call, remember to state

*"This is an emergency response drill. My name is ___. This is not an actual emergency. All events are simulated. All phone calls will be made to (your number) for this simulation."*

### *H Hour*

The event information is passed to the participating employee who then places the phone call previously described in the overdue aircraft procedures section (Phase 2).

#### Goal:

It is imperative that the information passed from the reporting employee be documented by the scheduler/dispatcher and passed to a response team member. The person taking the call should use a standard ERP form and record all applicable details. No comments regarding the accident should be made until the information is verified. A member of the response team activates or acquires permission to activate the ERP.

#### Facilitator Notes:

Upon the initial report of the aircraft accident involving NXXXX the potential is high for distractions and misinformation at this point in the timeline. Are there injuries, are emergency responders on scene, who is involved at this time? All of these details are important but at this point it's important that the employees involved focus on confirming and organizing the initial information.

#### Additional Notes/Lessons Learned

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### *H+10 minutes:*

The response team is now fully aware of all available information and should be actively discussing what other information they can obtain and validate. Operations should obtain the exercise manifest, verify the original flight profile and provide the flight manifest to the response team.

#### Goal:

Response team leader should ensure the ERP is properly activated and critical managers are alerted. They should also begin confirming reported details. All team members review specific duties and responsibilities. The team leader should begin directing selected external notifications as required by the ERP.

Facilitator Notes:

The call list should be activated. Calls should be made to verify the phone numbers are accurate. This is where you might discover what phone numbers have not been updated, and who is difficult to reach, for example: Mrs. Smith is on vacation, who is doing her job? Make sure team members document all external communications.

Additional Notes/Lessons Learned

## *H+15 minutes*:

Have the participating employee call in again as the SAR team leader at the accident site, observe as the call makes its way to the appropriate team member. Indicate you are coordinating communication at the crash site and described the aircraft as appearing destroyed and the status of survivors is unknown. The team should obtain a callback number for the officer and use it to ask about survivors later in the exercise.

Goal:

The team leader should be organizing the response members, compiling available information, and conducting a status brief by this point. The leader now begins to send team members out to execute their specific duties and report back. For a tabletop format this can be acted out or discussed. A priority at this point is passenger & crew status information. A bystander flying a recreational drone has already posted a picture of the aircraft accident on social media.

Communications should be managed to ensure that facts surrounding a reported emergency are properly vetted prior to releasing any external statements. All information relative to an accident or incident or other emergency should be treated as extremely sensitive and held in the strictest confidence.

Facilitator Notes:

Communication of the circumstances from event site to the response team is crucial in all emergencies. Carefully monitor the accuracy of information as it is assembled and communicated. Initial information about an event is usually incomplete and often incorrect. It is critical to verify information and avoid making assumptions or misstatements. Monitoring online conversations (“social listening”) about the company is an essential form of intelligence, particularly during a crisis, and will allow the company to adapt its communication strategy and engage more effectively with key influencers as the story develops.

Additional Notes/Lessons Learned

## *H+20 minutes:*

Place a phone call simulating a call from a local TV station asking for information. Be persistent, a pain in the neck. Observe your team as they make decisions concerning the status of the crew and passengers. Accurate accident information should be passed to other company employees to prevent rumor overload.

### Goal:

All employees need to refrain from speculating or commenting on the emergency and should direct all questions to the designated spokesman. To the extent required, all public statements regarding an accident or incident will be adequately coordinated with NTSB. Only the NTSB may release factual information on an investigation. Coordinate media releases and press conferences with the NTSB public affairs officer. The ERP itself should contain some type of preformatted response for employees indicating the response is being executed and they have no other details or comments. Individuals within the management team who use social media personally should also be persuaded to limit their comments to the approved messaging, which must remain authentic. Other employees should also be reminded of the company's social media policy.

### Facilitator Notes:

The information disseminated to others must be clear, factual and completely absent conjecture about the event. Observe the team member's communication carefully and determine if they are creating any ambiguity about the event.

### Additional Notes/Lessons Learned

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## *H+30 minutes:*

Have the participating employee call in again as the SAR team leader at the accident site to report that the SIC was the sole survivor and was rushed to the nearest hospital with life threatening injuries. All other crew members and passengers did not survive.

### Goal:

The response team should be gathering their specific positional information by this time, and the procedures for NTSB notification reviewed as well as the procedures for participating as a party to the NTSB's investigation. Next of kin (NOK) notification information for the crew members and passengers should begin being collected. Engaging with any HR assets (or retained services) should be in work as NOK notification is planned out.

### Facilitator Notes:

Carefully observe coordination with other company entities outside the tabletop exercise area. Also monitor your team for signs of stress. Events surrounding a serious accident can result in emotional distress and trauma that must not be overlooked. Some people need to remain involved and be kept active in order to cope with this type of stress; others are almost unable to function and require immediate attention by social workers who are trained to cope with these situations.

Additional Notes/Lessons Learned

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## *H+45 minutes:*

Multiple comments have been posted on social media about the accident. Some of the comments include incorrect statements. Observe how the team reacts to this false information. Evaluate how internal communication has progressed. Are all of the appropriate personnel in your company apprised of the events? The details of the accident should be consistent throughout the company by now.

Goal:

The team shouldn't become distracted by false statements or negative comments. They should remain focused on the ERP duties and assignments. A policy should be established for responding to comments, or for correcting any misinformation or incorrect statements which are posted.

Facilitator Notes:

Take a step back and ensure the drill is under control. Observe how your team handles distractions such as a false report but make sure it does not impair the progress of the response progression. You should observe the team with a clear, coherent picture of the event by this point; not everything will be known, but team coordination should be smooth and strategy clear.

Additional Notes/Lessons Learned

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## *H+55 minutes:*

An accurate picture of the accident is crucial by this point and all or most of the functions and assignments should be ongoing, with each team member following their respective checklists or direction from the team leader. Introduce any additional information as necessary based on the exercise direction to this point in time. The insurance company should also be contacted by this point to initiate any claim action but more importantly to gain their response assistance.

Goal:

The physical status of the aircraft may have been discussed or resolved previously; if not it should be addressed now to ensure it is secure and nothing is touched pending NTSB investigation. Team members execute their responsibilities with limited direction and don't introduce confusion. Documentation of all the team activities is accurate and complete. Coordination with necessary outside elements is now established.

Facilitator Notes**:**

You can let the exercise flow on its own to the point of completion. Introduce further information to complement existing details as necessary but avoid injecting new circumstances at this point in the exercise. Use judgment to decide when enough is enough and the participants have gained all they can from the training.

Additional Notes/Lessons Learned

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## *H Complete:*

When at a logical stop point, end the exercise. Ask team members to complete any notes and other documentation and then collect all of the papers, folders, etc. Give the participants a 15-minute break and then gather back into the space for a debrief of the exercise.

Goal:

All of the documentation that occurred during the exercise is valuable history that can be used to evaluate team performance and the ERP itself. Ensure all documentation is organized for post exercise evaluation.

Facilitator Notes:

This is not the time for a full analysis of the drill, but it is important to provide some interesting feedback on the observations. Review your facilitator notes and prepare some highlighted and important observations for the debrief.

Additional Notes/Lessons Learned

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## *Team Debrief:*

Good job to the response team! They dedicated their time and worked through the exercise. Use the debrief to review the exercise scenario, answer questions and discuss strengths and weaknesses identified in the initial review. Encourage interaction and discussion during the debrief and be careful not to criticize individuals directly. Develop some simple takeaways and action items for the team to improve the ERP.

Performance weaknesses should be examined from a process and training perspective; if there are individual performance problems, they should be presented to the team leader or applicable manager with discretion.

## Team Debrief Notes and Lessons Learned

## Post Drill Report:

Create a detailed summary write-up of the exercise, with particular focus on team training recommendations. The strengths and weaknesses of the ERP should also be described. Make sure to use all of the documentation from the exercise to highlight and support conclusions and observations.

## Document:

Ensure the training is documented for the response team members and assist in any necessary changes to the ERP.

**It could happen on any given day. Be prepared!**

PRISM

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