

Better practice for disaster situations

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Accidents, terror attacks and catastrophic events present big challenges for civil defense disaster relief forces. In a new publication, Fraunhofer IAO, the German Red Cross and the Bavarian Red Cross unveil concepts for full-scale drills responding to a mass-casualty incident.

Events such as the attack at Breitscheidplatz in Berlin or the train crash near Bad Aibling have shown that it is important for aid organizations, the fire service, the police, the German Federal Agency for Technical Relief, and relief agencies to be prepared for major incidents and catastrophes. Full-scale drills of mass-casualty incidents (MCIs) enable relief forces to take set pieces previously practiced in isolation, run them together and prepare for a real disaster event. So that helpers can deal with the particular challenges of emergency situations, the drills must be as authentic as possible in their design. This is the only way for relief forces to develop skills that are decisive in emergency situations – including both technical qualifications and the “soft skills” required for successful teamwork under stress.

Organizing drills takes a lot of time and resources. So it's all the more crucial that the time and money spent on drill planning should pay off and that achievement of the exercise goals is regularly reviewed. However, hardly any standardized MCI drill concepts have been established to date. The newly published volume addresses the actual situation for full-scale drills and groups 14 existing drill approaches into 5 similar concepts according to aspects of implementation. As well as raising awareness about drills and their follow-ups, the volume also helps participants implement the drills on site, showing them how to design drills more easily and efficiently through standards and uniform practices.

The volume describes the whole process, including planning, preparation at short notice, and implementation on the day of the drill. For example, it highlights how important it is to define the objectives of the drill, select realistic casualty patterns and train the people playing the roles of casualties so that they are able to record data about the performance of the relief mission while the drill is happening. For the first time, relief forces have the opportunity to practice drills of different scenarios and scales ranging from 9 to 50 casualties according to a defined standard and compare them based on 6 evaluation indicators. The main focus is on patient-oriented evaluation, which takes place on the day of the drill itself and also later at a follow-up meeting with managers. The authors also place a lot of emphasis on creating drills that are easy to implement and in writing texts that are easy to follow. Accordingly, aids such as key messages, checklists and templates are included to facilitate planning, preparation, execution and post-processing the MCI drills.

The research work originated in the EU's CRISMA project, which ran from 2013 to 2015 (“Modelling Crisis Management for Improved Action and Preparedness,” FP7/2007-2013, Grant Agreement No. 284552). During this time, the pilot concept was already tested in three drills with 10 to 40 casualties and up to 300 relief workers. The drill data and evaluation indicators opened up a new, fact-based perspective on the performance of the relief operations. Now the pilot concept can be used at all levels of the German Red Cross, and in other civil defense organizations, as the basis for developing further region-specific recommendations for action and implementation. Moreover, Fraunhofer IAO was also able to use the concept as the basis for data-based evaluation of the ICAO emergency drill at Stuttgart Airport.

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