

## ***OEC/ICTAP***

Office of Emergency Communications / Interoperable Communications Technical Assistance Program

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# Information Package

## Communication Unit Leader Exercise (COMLEX)



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## INTRODUCTION

The Communications Unit Leader Exercise (COMLEX) is a communication focused functional exercise (FE) designed to establish a learning environment for participants to exercise their emergency response plans, policies, and procedures as they pertain to a man-made or natural disaster response and recovery. A FE is a complex exercise that requires detailed planning for a successful exercise.

The purpose of this document is to provide basic exercise information and the logistical requirements needed for a successful exercise. The Office of Emergency Communications (OEC) Interoperable Communications Technical Assistance Program (ICTAP) will assist in any way possible with these requirements. However, in the end, it is the responsibility of the Exercise Planning Team (EPT) to ensure the requirements listed in this package are in place prior to the exercise. This document will cover the requirements for the:

- Concept and Objectives Meeting
- Initial Planning Conference (IPC)
- Mid Planning Conference (MPC)
- Final Planning Conference (FPC)
- Master Scenario Events List (MSEL) Workshop
- Exercise/Hotwash
- After Action Conference (AAC)/Corrective Action Program (CAP)

**Note:** *The first meeting will be a combined Concept and Objectives Meeting and IPC and will be referred to in this document as the IPC. The second meeting will be a combined MPC, FPC and MSEL Workshop and will be referred to in this document as the FPC.*

The exercise is per Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Program (HSEEP) guidance.

## EXERCISE PLANNING TEAM

Prior to the first meeting, identify and invite EPT members and appoint an EPT Leader. The EPT Leader will work closely with OEC/ICTAP staff as they plan and execute the COMLEX and should therefore be the primary point of contact (POC) with OEC/ICTAP staff.

The EPT should be staffed with qualified COMLs, dispatchers/supervisors, and communication subject matter experts (SMEs). SMEs should have a working knowledge of regional communication systems and assets.

EPT members will be asked to assist in the development of the exercise and participate in the exercise as controllers, simulators/actors, and exercise support staff. Some of the positions they may fill are:

**Controllers:** Controllers set up and operate the exercise site and plan and manage exercise play. Controllers direct the pace of exercise play and routinely include members from the exercise planning team. Controllers also work with the SIMCELL to control the flow of the exercise and explain or clarify issues arising during the

exercise. Controllers are supervised by the Lead Controller and will be qualified COMLs.

**Simulation Cell (SIMCELL):** The SIMCELL will respond to the player's interactions and provide and document communication activities, including exercise injects per the Master Scenario Events List (MSEL).

**Simulators:** Simulators role-play as non-participating agencies or individuals. They most often operate with or in the SIMCELL.

**Actors:** Actors are exercise participants who act or simulate specific roles during exercise play. (e.g., Incident Command System (ICS) positions, HazMat Specialist, SWAT, news media, etc.).

**Evaluators:** Evaluators are selected to evaluate and provide feedback of the exercise. They are selected based on their subject matter expertise in the functional area(s). They have been assigned to evaluate the exercise based on their familiarity with local emergency response plans, policies, and procedures.

**Support Staff:** Exercise support staff includes individuals who are assigned administrative and logistical support tasks during the exercise (e.g., registration, catering, etc.).

**COML Trainees/Players:** Players are COML trainees who have attended the COML class but have not had an opportunity to complete their task book to become a qualified COML. Players will have an active role in responding to the simulated emergency and perform their regular roles and responsibilities during the exercise. Players initiate actions that will respond to and mitigate the simulated emergency. COML trainees are the players during the exercise and will not be able to participate in the planning of the exercise.

**COMT Trainees/Players:** COMT trainees will also be given an opportunity to address their required tasks to complete their task books during the exercise.

All the positions referenced above are commonly referred to as exercise participants.

The responsibilities of the EPT are to:

- Participate in planning meetings and the COMLEX
- Assist in the development of the scenario, goals, objectives, and target capabilities
- Identify & Invite COML Trainees
  - Send Invitation Letters
    - Include the
      - ICS Forms Package
      - COML Task Book
      - ExPlan
- Address COMLEX Logistics
  - Identify and reserve the exercise venue
  - Identify, reserve, and assign command/communication mobile units
  - Identify, and reserve communication equipment needed for the exercise
  - Catering

- Assist in the development of exercise support documents
  - Develop an ICS Form 201 Incident Briefing
  - Develop an ICS Form 205 Incident Radio Communications Plan
  - Develop an ICS Form 217A Available Resource List
- Identify and assign EPT personnel to fill exercise positions
  - Develop a EPT Roster with contact information

The EPT responsibilities listed above are included in the IPC agenda. Prior to the IPC meeting, the EPT members should review the IPC agenda. Contact information should be collected and entered into the EPT Roster and will be validated at the IPC.

**Table 1: EPT Roster**

Last Name	First Name	Title	Agency	Exercise Position	Cell Phone	Email Address

## CONCEPT AND OBJECTIVES MEETING AND INITIAL PLANNING CONFERENCE

The EPT Leader will need to set a date, start time, and location for the IPC. The room should be large enough to comfortably accommodate the entire EPT. The room should be setup so all participants are able to see the screen and carry on an interactive discussion of exercise requirements. Tables arranged in a in a “U” shape layout works the best for the planning meetings.

The room should have a projector, screen, and power strip for the OEC/ICTAP staff. The OEC/ICTAP staff will include a facilitator and data specialist. The meeting should be expected to last approximately 4-6 hrs and EPT members should be available the entire time. Consideration for the meeting start time should accommodate travel (time/distance) for EPT members.

The objectives of the IPC are to:

- Introduce EPT members and confirm contact information
- Familiarize EPT members with the COMLEX
  - Phase 1 Preparedness
  - Phase 2 Check-in/Briefings
  - Phase 3 Communication Operations
  - Phase 4 Planning Process
  - Phase 5 Demobilization and Documentation
- Begin design and development of the COMLEX scenario, goal, objectives and target capabilities
- Identify the responding jurisdictions, agencies and disciplines
  - Participating agencies
  - Simulated agencies

- Identify the dispatch centers and EOC
  - Initial Dispatch Channel for each discipline
  - Interoperable Channels for extended and major operations
  - Emergency Support Function #2 Activation
- Initiate Exercise ICS Forms
  - Draft an ICS Form 201 Incident Briefing
  - Draft an ICS Form 205 Incident Radio Communications Plan
  - Draft an ICS Form 217A Available Resource List
- Identify COML players and communication assets needed for the exercise
  - Form COML teams (one team per mobile comm vehicle)
  - Identify and assign Controllers (one per COML team)
  - Identify and assign Radio Operators (RADOs)(one per COML team)
  - Group players with communications equipment they most likely would use during an emergency response in their region.

Table 2 is an example of the COML Team Assignments to be reviewed and validated by the EPT prior to the exercise.

**Table 2: COML Team Assignments**

Position	Name	Title	Agency
Exercise Director			
Lead Controller			
Team 1 Controller			
Team 1 RADO			
Team 1 COMT			
Team 1 COML			
Team 1 COML			
Team 1 COML			
Team 1 Support			
Team 2 Controller			
Team 2 RADO			
Team 2 COMT			
Team 2 COML			
Team 2 COML			
Team 2 COML			
Team 2 Support			
Team 3 Controller			
Team 3 RADO			
Team 3 COMT			
Team 3 COML			
Team 3 COML			

Position	Name	Title	Agency
Team 3 COML			
Team 3 Support			
Controller/COMC			
Controller/SIMCELL			
Controller/SIMCELL			
Data Specialist/Actor			
IMT Actor/Simulator			
IMT Actor/Simulator			
Support Staff			
Support Staff			
Observer			
Observer			
Observer			

Team # and Mobile Unit Designator	Agency	Controller	RADO
T1			
T2			
T3			
SIMCELL			

The following table is an example of the COMLEX Command/Communications Mobile Units to be reviewed and validated by the EPT prior to the exercise.

- Identify communication equipment for the exercise
- Identify mobile command/communications unit (Capabilities)

**Table 3: COMLEX Command/Communications Mobile Units**

Team 1 Mobile Unit	
Agency	[Add Owning Agency]
Unit Identifier	[Add Unit Name]
Capabilities	Type
Mobile Radios	
Cache Radios	
Gateway	
Mobile Relays/Repeaters	
Data Terminals	
Internet Connectivity	
Fax	
Surveillance	
Amateur Radio Equip	

Other	
Other	
Auxiliary Power	

The following table is an example of the exercise schedule to be reviewed and validated by the EPT prior to the exercise.

- Identify and confirm dates, start time and location for the FPC and the COMLEX
- Gather the information needed for the Exercise Plan (ExPlan), Controller/Evaluator (C/E) Handbook, and MSEL

**Table 4: Exercise Schedule**

Time	Personnel	Activity
<b>Exercise Set-up [Date]</b>		
1300-1700	Exercise Director, Lead Controller and selected EPT staff	Classroom, equipment and SIMCELL setup
<b>COMLEX [Date]</b>		
0630	Select EPT: Controllers, Comm Unit Mobilization Personnel and Exercise Support Staff	Setup of exercise equipment
0730	Exercise Staff	Check in
0730	Participants	Register
0745	Controllers, Evaluators, Support Staff, Simulator/Actors, and SIMCELL	Briefing /communications check
0755	All	Report to STARTEX location
0800	All	Exercise Play Start (STARTEX)
1630 (estimated)	All	Exercise Play End (ENDEX)
Immediately following ENDEX	All Participants	Hotwash/ Participant Feedback Form
<b>Exercise Debrief/Final Documentation [Date]</b>		
0900	Exercise Planning Team controllers, evaluators, and invited participants	Exercise review/final documentation

Following the IPC, the action items listed below will need to be address prior to the FPC:

- Prepare and send the COML Invitation Letter, ICS Forms Packet, and COML Task Book to COML Trainees
- Identify and reserve the COMLEX facilities and equipment
- Invite agencies and personnel identified to assist with the COMLEX who did not attend the IPC
- Finalize the ExPlan and send to all exercise participants
- Review the draft Controller/Evaluator (C/E) Handbook and finalize at the FPC
- Review the draft MSEL and finalize at the FPC

## MID PLANNING & FINAL PLANNING CONFERENCE (FPC)

The EPT Leader will need to set a date, start time, and location for the FPC. The room should be large enough to comfortably accommodate the entire EPT. The room should be setup so all participants are able to see the screen and carry on an interactive discussion of exercise requirements.

The room should have a projector, screen, and power strip for the OEC/ICTAP staff. The OEC/ICTAP staff will include a facilitator and data specialist. The meeting should be expected to last approximately 4-6 hrs and EPT members should be available the entire time. Consideration for the meeting start time should accommodate travel (time/distance) for EPT members.

The objectives of the FPC are to:

- Distribute exercise support documents for review and validation of the information
  - ExPlan
  - C/E Handbook
    - MSEL
    - Exercise Evaluation Guides (EEG)s
  - Completed ICS Forms and Maps needed to support the exercise
    - ICS Form 201 Incident Briefing
    - ICS Form 213 General Message
    - ICS Form 215 Operational Planning Worksheet
    - Next operational period Goals and Objectives
    - Incident Map
  - Possible blank ICS Forms to be filled out as needed to support the exercise injects
    - ICS Form 210 Status Change Card
    - ICS Form 213 General Message Form
  - Distribute blank exercise ICS Forms to exercise actors/simulators to use during the exercise
    - ICS Form 211 Check-in
    - Plans meeting and operations briefing agenda
- Finalize COMLEX logistics
  - Exercise venue (classroom and equipment)
  - Verify arrangements for lunch during the exercise (e.g. bring your own, catering, etc.)
  - Identify who will print exercise documents, name tags, table tents, and sign-in sheets
  - Identify exercise Observers and VIPs

## **MASTER SCENARIO EVENTS LIST & EXERCISE EVALUATION GUIDE WORKSHOP**

The MSEL is the primary exercise control document. It is a chronological listing of scripted exercise injects/messages that generate activity in specific functional areas in support of the exercise goal and objectives. Each MSEL inject specifies the inject number, caller, communication method, person involved; inject description, task and expected outcome.

The MSEL:

- Helps controllers and the SIMCELL track the flow of the exercise to accomplish exercise goals, objectives and target capabilities
- Helps simulators perform their roles (e.g., at the right time, using the appropriate method, etc.)
- Includes all of the COML required tasks to become a qualified COML

The EEGs have been developed to assist in the evaluation of exercises by providing evaluators with consistent standards and guidelines for observation, data collection and analysis, and report writing. Using EEGs can help you develop stronger and more consistent After Action Report/Improvement Plans (AAR/IPs). EEGs provide exercise controllers and evaluators with a manageable tool with which they can collect data during an exercise, in a format allowing the easy transfer of information to the AAR/IP.

The EEGs have been incorporated into the MSEL below each task, eliminating the need for multiple documents during the exercise. The MSEL and EEGs are appendices in the C/E Handbook.

The following are some examples of the MSEL and EEGs:

Table 5: Examples of an MSEL and EEG

PHASE 1						
The exercise scenario is:						
Controller will visually inspect each COML's Kit and sign off the EEG at the bottom of each task. Document the activity/challenge, conclusion and recommendation. Note: all listed COML kit items are recommended. COMLs should have ICS forms, office supplies, personal items, to last a couple of operational periods and also include a communication specific toolkit and a first aid kit. Note in the EEG any missing items and recommend inclusion in their COML Kit.						
INJECT#	Caller	Method	Involved	Inject	Task	Outcome
1.	Controller	Visual	COML	Visually Inspect COML Kit	1. Obtain and assemble information and materials needed for a response kit prior to receiving an assignment, including critical items needed for the assignment and items needed for functioning during the first 48 hours. The following items are suggested as basic information and materials kept in a go bag:  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appropriate ICS forms and logs.</li> <li>• Current Tactical Interoperable Communications Plan (TICP) and Statewide Communications Interoperability Plan (SCIP), if available.</li> <li>• Inventories or other lists of local and regional communications response equipment.</li> <li>• Preplanned local system coverage maps.</li> <li>• Contact, capability, and availability information for local and regional Communications Technicians and Specialists.</li> <li>• National Interoperability Field Operation Guide (NIFOG).</li> <li>• COML Mobilization Guide (specific to locality).</li> <li>• Pads of paper, pencils, pens, clipboard, and tape.</li> <li>• Personal items (including medicine and cash), food and beverage to be self-sustained for 48 hours or more.</li> <li>• Portable radio(s) as appropriate for the region.</li> <li>• Radio programming equipment (cloning cable or computer), adapters, and suitable tools</li> <li>• GPS.</li> <li>• First-aid kit.</li> <li>• 24-hour clock.</li> <li>• Communication toolkit.</li> <li>• Thumb drive.</li> </ul>	Have minimal required material.
2.	Controller	Visual	COML	First Aid Kit		Appropriate ICS forms and logs.
			COML	ICS Forms		ICS forms should include:
			COML	Office Supplies		
			COML	Personal Items		
			COML	Communication toolkit		
			COML	Document any additional items in the EEG section (e.g., GPS, Computer, printer, reference documents, etc.). Reference the Task #1 Checklist.		<p>ICS Form 201 ICS Form 205 ICS Form 210 ICS Form 213 ICS Form 214 ICS Form 217 ICS Form 225 ICS Form 309</p> <p>Pads of paper, pencils, pens, clipboard, and tape.</p> <p>Personal items (including medicine and cash), food and beverage to be self-sustained for 48 hours or more.</p> <p>First-aid kit.</p> <p>Communication toolkit.</p> <p>Controller will check each COML response kit. Shaded items are the strongly recommended compliment.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> YES Initial _____ Activity/Challenges: Conclusion: Recommendations:						

PHASE 2						
COML will receive incident information.						
INJECT#	Caller	Method	Involved	Inject	Task	Outcome
3.	Facilitator	Verbal	Team 1 COMLs	Dispatch Information	2. Obtain complete information from the public safety communications center(s) serving the area and incident upon initial activation, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Incident name and, as appropriate, an order, request, or other unique number identifying the incident for tracking purposes.</li> <li>Reporting location.</li> <li>Reporting time.</li> <li>Transportation arrangements/travel routes.</li> <li>Contact procedures during travel (telephone/radio).</li> </ul>	<b>ACTIVITY</b> COML will initiate a 214 Unit Log with dispatch information.
4.	Facilitator	Verbal	Team 2 COMLs	Dispatch Information		
5.	Facilitator	Verbal	Team 3 COMLs	Dispatch Information		
<input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> YES Initial _____ Activity/Challenges: Conclusion: Recommendations:						

PHASE 3						
Post and activate their Comm Plan and establish an Incident Communication Center (ICC).						
INJECT#	Caller	Method	Involved	Inject	Task	Outcome
6.	Controller/ IC	Verbal	COML	ICC set-up	10. Establish Incident Communications Center (ICC). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coordinate location of ICC with your supervisor</li> <li>Locate ICC close to the incident command post and away from high traffic areas and noise.</li> <li>Locate ICC away from radio frequency and electronic noise.</li> <li>Verify Estimated Time of Arrival (ETA) of communications personnel and establish assignments based on incident requirements. Set schedules around operations requirements.</li> <li>Obtain necessary supplies for ICC to function properly.</li> </ul>	<b>ACTIVITY</b> COML will establish an ICC.
7.	SIMCELL/ Controller	Radio, cell, or landline	COML	Verify ETA of personnel and equipment		
<input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> YES Initial _____ Activity/Challenge: Conclusion: Recommendation:						

## COMLEX SETUP

Typically the day before the exercise, key exercise staff personnel will set up the classroom, communications equipment, SIMCELL and conduct a communications check in preparation for the exercise. There are many variables and considerations for setting up the afternoon before or the morning of the exercise, will be discussed at the IPC.

### Command/Communication Unit Setup (Phase 3)

The exercise venue needs to be large enough to accommodate all of the vehicles. The following issues should be addressed:

- Have arrangements been made with the facility POC to access the facility?
- Is the area secure or will security need to be provided overnight for the equipment?
- Will facilities be available for environment considerations? (e.g., shade canopy, tables, etc.)

### Exercise Classroom Setup (Phase 1, 2, 4, & 5)

There are some simple, but very important, guidelines to follow when determining the layout of the exercise classroom:

- Arrange the tables so that:
  - All COML team members sit together (e.g., COMLs, Controller, RADO)
  - All players can see the exercise facilitator
  - All players can see the projected images
  - Observers are apart from the players (i.e. in a “U” shape around the edge of the room or “Audience seating” in the back of the room).
- Place clearly visible identification “table tents” on each table so players will know where to go when they arrive in the room,
- Set up and test the computers/projectors.
- Identify the location for catering and ensure there is an EPT member assigned to assist the catering crew when they arrive.
- Note that an equal level of effort should be available to break down following the exercise and return the classroom to its original state.

## COMLEX

The COMLEX is a communication focused exercise providing an opportunity for communication unit personnel to perform core competencies for their position. They include emergency response professionals operating under the Incident Command System (ICS) principles to effectively and efficiently respond to, and recover from, a plausible and realistic emergency incident response and recovery scenario.

Events are projected through a scripted exercise scenario that has built-in flexibility to allow updates to drive activity and provide an opportunity for performance based communication unit personnel to complete the required tasks to become a qualified COML or COMT. The COMLEX is conducted in real-time that closely mirrors a real incident for multiple operational periods.\

The COMLEX structure consists of five (5) Phases:

- Phase 1 – Preparedness and Initial Response
- Phase 2 – Check-in/Briefing
- Phase 3 – Communication Operations
- Phase 4 – Planning Process
- Phase 5 – Documentation and Demobilization

The COMLEX simulates reality by presenting complex and realistic communication problems involving operations in multiple functional areas that require critical thinking, rapid problem-solving, and effective responses by trained COMs in a realistic environment.

### **Registration**

In an ideal world, all participants have pre-registered, and registration is a simple exercise of “checking off” the participant’s name on a pre-prepared list, handing him/her a badge or nametag, and giving him/her their assigned exercise documents. In the real world, of course, that seldom happens; issues may complicate the registration process, such as last-minute substitutions of agency personnel, and participants showing up with no clear notion of their role in the exercise.

The registration table should be set up to accommodate a rapid registration process. This initial contact will be the first experience participants will have at the exercise. First impressions are lasting ones, so it is a good idea to make this contact a positive experience.

The following items are some suggestions that may help ease the pain of registration:

- Have copies of the pre-registration list for every registrar at the pre-registration table
- Hand a registration sheet to any participants who have not pre-registered
- Be prepared to tell participants their exercise title (e.g., SIMCELL, player, etc.).

## **HOTWASH**

Immediately following the exercise, an informal debriefing (hotwash) will be conducted to gather comments and document the first impressions of the participants while the exercise activities are still fresh in their minds.

Controllers and evaluators should take notes they may find useful for the completion of notes and evaluation forms.

## **EXERCISE PLANNING TEAM DEBRIEF**

An EPT debriefing will be held after the hotwash. This is a more formal review of the exercise and the best practices and lessons learned, covering each exercise goal and objectives, target capabilities, communication challenges, and future exercise enhancements..

EPT members are expected to complete and turn in their documentation before leaving the Team Debriefing. The last part of this debriefing will be set aside for controllers and evaluators to complete or rewrite their evaluation forms as necessary before submitting them to the Lead Controller for use in the development of the AAR and signing of COML and COMT task books. EPT representatives will remain onsite to assist controllers and evaluators with questions and/or clarifications, as necessary. The final outcome of the debriefing will be an AAR/IP that reflects the input from each controller and evaluator that participated in the exercise.

## **AFTER ACTION CONFERENCE/CORRECTIVE ACTION PROGRAM**

The purpose of the After Action Report (AAC) is to deliver the AAR/IP, review the exercise findings with the group, and to finish the IP with assignees and timeframes in accordance with an overall Corrective Action Program (CAP). The AAC will be at the discretion of the EPT Lead and can be held remotely via a net-meeting.

OEC/ICTAP recommends the following audience as recipients of the AAR/IP and as attendees to the AAC:

- Exercise Planning Team
- Agency representative/communications specialists
- Selected exercise participants
- Selected agency executives

The EPT Leader or designee will need to secure a suitable location for the AAC to occur. The room should be large enough to comfortably accommodate all invitees and setup for all participants to be able to see a screen and carry on a discussion.

The room should have a projector, screen, and enough power outlets for several laptops and the projector.

A conference invitation should be sent out to the EPT and all agencies that participated in the COMLEX. Each agency should be encouraged to send a representative to the AAC. A face to face conference should be expected to last approximately 2-3 hrs. The net-meeting conference should last around an hour.

## **CONCLUSION**

We at OEC/ICTAP thank you for your dedication to this effort and the time and energy you have invested in its success. Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions or ways in which we can help. We look forward to partnering with you on this exercise.