

Champion of COVID Response

FEMA Region V REPP Team

Department of Homeland Security
Federal Emergency Management Agency



Summary:

FEMA's Radiological Emergency Preparedness (REP) program ensures that the communities surrounding commercial nuclear power plants have the plans and preparedness to respond to power plant incidents. This nomination recognizes the employees of the FEMA Region 5 Technological Hazards Branch. They wore two hats this year: COVID Response and REP. But they had only one mission: "Protect the Public". The communities show reasonable assurance by participating in biennial REP exercises. These multi-agency, multi-jurisdiction exercises are organized by each state and evaluated by FEMA. In 2020, FEMA Region 5 performed six REP exercises.

Description: The first exercise was in March 2020, before the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency (PHE) was declared. By mid-March, FEMA and our states began transitioning into Public Health Emergency (PHE) Response Operations. REP Exercises were postponed until our state and local partners were out of the response phase. The Team tailored activities based on state and local government operations, and reviewed policy and doctrine in the December 2019 REP Program Manual. This manual provided additional flexibility in the REP program, which allowed the team to develop plans to obtain reasonable assurance during the on-going COVID-19 PHE. Actual Incident Credit Our State and local governments were activated for months. We encouraged our response agencies to submit actual incident credit for their COVID -19 responses. By documenting their core capabilities in an actual emergency, we were able to provide exercise credit for roughly half of the criteria. This innovation substantially reduced the size and complexity of the required REP exercises. Alternative Demonstrations Remaining criteria typically contained radiological points of review: the specific criteria essential for the radiological emergency response. These criteria are typically evaluated by in-person drills, however, during the PHE, we worked with state and local governments to use virtual video conference technology to hold virtual assessments. If the demonstration could be done around a conference table, it could be done by VTC. This took additional time and planning, but the drills could be done without travel or increased exposure risk.

Virtual REP Exercises

This proved to be the most innovative concept of them all. Ohio was the first state to demonstrate via Virtual REP Exercise in September 2020. FEMA and Ohio worked together to develop the Microsoft Team "channels" and "rooms" to facilitate state-wide virtual a network, spanning three counties and the State of Ohio. The exercise was so successful that Ohio maintained the VTC infrastructure for their on-going response operations. The exercise was identified as a success in a NEMAWEB article. Illinois, Minnesota and Wisconsin quickly followed by replicating Ohio's setup and performing four virtual REP Exercises between September and December. Because of the virtual exercise format, FEMA saved at least \$500,000 this year in travel and contractor funds.

Outcomes:

These innovations ensured reasonable assurances for six REP facilities in 2020. The team was successful in simplifying reasonable assurance requirements during a nation-wide PHE. They reduced the regulatory burden to our state and local governments and followed CDC recommendations by reducing the worker and survivor exposure to each other during the PHE. Finally, the exercises resulted in a \$500,000 cost savings by reducing the need to travel and hire outside contractors. All the innovation demonstrated was permitted by policy and doctrine and was identified as best practices by FEMA HQ

Brett Beardsley, Senior EM Specialist
Carl Bebrich, Site Specialist
Katherine Boyce, Site Specialist
Angela Cloutier, Site Specialist
Edward Diaz, Site Specialist
Eric Franco, Site Specialist
Todd Gemske, Site Specialist
Edward Golinski, Supervisory EM Specialist
James King, Site Specialist
Todd Lawson, Senior EM Specialist
Sean O'Leary, Branch Chief
David Persaud, Site Specialist
Karl Rabenhorst, Site Specialist
Brian Reinhart, Site Specialist
Debra Schneck, Site Specialist
Stephen Tulley, Supervisory EM Specialist
Todd Trygier, Site Specialist
Curtis Williams, Site Specialist