

# Active Assailant Response Exercises: Weapons Guidance



*This document provides considerations for planning, conducting, and evaluating exercises where Fire/Rescue, Emergency Medical Services (EMS), and Law Enforcement personnel will be participating in a simulated active shooter response. Specifically, this document focuses on considerations surrounding the use of weapons as part of exercise play and details a step-by-step process for determining an exercise weapons policy that best meets the needs of all participants. The information contained herein was compiled through various documents authored by subject matter experts and aims to serve as guidance and recommendations, not as prescriptive requirements.*

## Pre-Exercise

*Successful exercises require significant planning to ensure a productive and safe learning experience for participants. Like any other exercise, active assailant response/Rescue Task Force exercises should follow the Homeland Security Exercise Evaluation Program (HSEEP) process to plan, deliver, and evaluate the exercise. The steps below are intended to provide additional context to exercise planners as they implement the HSEEP planning process.*

### What are the objectives of the exercise?

**The exercise planning team should first determine the objectives of the exercise, prior to determining what types of weapons are most appropriate.** Consistent with HSEEP, the initial step in planning any exercise is to first determine the objectives of the exercise. In some cases, an exercise may be designed to allow participants to gain familiarity with rescue task force operations and support skill development for participants who may have less experience. In other instances, exercise objectives may seek to create a highly realistic environment for more experienced participants to refine their skills.



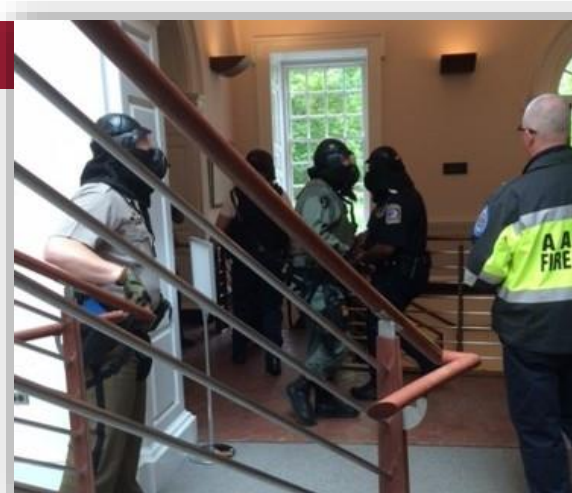
### Which type(s) of weapons best support exercise objectives?

**Weapons should be selected to best support exercise objectives, weighing the pros and cons of each weapon option.** Weapons may include firearms (e.g., long guns, pistols), flash bang grenades, smoke grenades/generators, simunitions, etc. Once exercise objectives have been developed, the exercise planning team can determine the most appropriate type of weapon to help achieve exercise objectives. If participants have less experience and the exercise is focused on skill development, simulated weapons (e.g., plastic/rubber molded in the shape of a weapon) might be most appropriate. However, if the exercise seeks to create a highly realistic experience for more experienced participants, real weapons “made safe” or converted to use simulated projectiles (e.g., paintballs or pellets) might be a better option. The exercise planning team will also need to consider the resource requirements associated with each option in making this determination. Using real weapons requires additional safety checks and personnel to ensure a safe exercise environment. **Live ammunition and edged weapons should never be allowed in the exercise area.**



### Who needs to be notified?

**Exercise participants should be notified ahead of time of the weapons policy for the exercise.** Once a decision has been made on the appropriate type of weapon, that information should be regularly communicated throughout the exercise planning process. Additionally, participants should be made aware of the weapons policy when they are invited to the exercise so there is no confusion on exercise day. **The general public should also be made aware that an exercise is happening** through public information officers for participating organizations. **Active assailant exercises should never be unannounced or no-notice.**



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## Exercise Day

*On the day of exercise conduct, a variety of steps are essential to ensuring a safe and productive learning environment. In addition to following all organization policies and procedures related to training and exercises, this section outlines additional considerations for the exercise planning team specific to rescue task force exercises and weapons.*

### Who is the assigned Safety Officer for the exercise?



**At least one Safety Officer should be assigned for rescue task force exercises.** While some exercises lend themselves to having a Safety Officer as a secondary assignment, in rescue task force exercises, a Safety Officer should be a primary and sole responsibility. Additionally, multiple safety officers should be considered depending on the size and scope of the exercise.

**The Safety Officer has responsibility before, during, and after the exercise.** Safety Officers should be engaged as part of the planning process to ensure the exercise planning team is allotting enough time for safety checks prior to the exercise and to ensure that exercise play and evaluation will be structured in a way that reduces the risk of injury to all involved. For more complex exercises, separate exercise planning meetings specific just to safety checks and procedures may be necessary.

### What is the process for safety checks?



**A multi-step process should be implemented to maximize safety.** Exercise participants should first be encouraged to self-check their own weapons and equipment to ensure compliance with the exercise weapons policy prior to arrival at the exercise site. Upon arrival at the exercise site, all exercise participants, including players, actors, controllers, evaluators, and observers, should be screened and cleared to ensure that any equipment or weapons are in line with the exercise weapons policy. There are multiple strategies for visually representing personnel and weapons that have been cleared, including use of ribbons tied to weapons, color-coded lanyards, and/or donning of vests by exercise participants. The logistics and resources necessary to implement the safety check process should be considered throughout the exercise planning process.

**Prior to the start of the exercise, all participants, including observers, should receive a safety briefing** that reviews the weapons policy, safety protocols for the exercise, how to report any observed unsafe activities, and the response plan if a real-world emergency should occur during the exercise. In addition, an outer perimeter should be established, and an overwatch duty assigned to prevent loaded weapons from entering the exercise area and to address real world emergencies requiring armed intervention.

## Post-Exercise

*In addition to conducting an exercise hotwash and gathering participant feedback consistent with the HSEEP process, in Rescue Task Force exercises, additional consideration should be given to connecting participants with mental health resources, if necessary.*

### What mental health resources are available to exercise participants?



**Participating in a Rescue Task Force exercise may be stressful for participants, especially if participants are not used to working around real weapons.** While law enforcement personnel utilize weapons in their daily jobs, Fire and EMS personnel generally have less exposure to weapons in their daily jobs. Additionally, the scenarios often depicted in Rescue Task Force training and exercises can be highly stressful. As a best practice, the exercise planning team should consider making mental health resources available to exercise participants and communicating the availability of those resources to participants as part of the exercise hotwash and debrief processes.



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