

Video transcript

Hilary Mouldsdales

Exercise manager in emergency preparedness and response

I'm Hilary Mouldsdales. I'm an exercise manager in emergency preparedness and response. I'm based at Porton Down, the emergency response department for Public Health England.

What is the purpose of your role?

I design and develop exercises for the health organisations and their partners, for example local authorities, the emergency services (including ambulance, police and fire) and we run training exercises to test their preparedness for ... in the event of any emergency, including chemical, biological, and radiological events.

Who do you work with?

I work in a team of 14 people. We have a couple of administrators that support the whole team. We also have four or five exercise coordinators that help with a lot of the logistics of running an exercise, and then we have the exercise managers who design and develop and plan the exercises to be run.

Tell me more about emergency exercises

The exercises that we plan, design and develop can either be table-top discussion exercises or workshop-based exercises to test specific parts of people's emergency plans, or they can be large field exercises when we do have actors playing casualties. They're our most exciting type of exercise, but they are the most expensive so we most often have to revert back to our desktops. We also run command post exercises when we're testing a number of incident control centres and their interactions between each other during an emergency.

What skills and qualifications are needed?

You have to be a very good communicator. The report-writing skills have to be honed to a fine art. We have to deliver our reports after each exercise within a couple of weeks after the exercise has finished. We have to be very well organised. We have to be people people so that we don't alienate our planning teams, because what we ask of them is actually quite a lot beyond their own job. It's best to have a degree to build your career on. For example, I've got a degree in biological sciences

from the University of Warwick. But we've also got emergency planners within our team and there's even an events manager as well who's moved into emergency preparedness.

What do you do in a typical week?

Our role is very varied. We probably wouldn't really have a typical week. But, for example, this week I would have spent Monday in the office, in which we had a team meeting. In the afternoon I went and talked to a medical director of the ambulance service who is also an expert on Ebola because I'm just currently drafting an off-the-shelf exercise for any importation of Ebola that we might see into this country. The following day I was at the Warwick Public Health England conference talking about three polio exercises that we ran for the World Health Organization, one in the UK, one in Ukraine, and one in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Hopefully I'll have one day in the office this week, a full day in the office. And on Friday I've got a cross-government planning meeting for a tier-1 cross-government exercise looking at preparedness for pandemic influenza. So I would say it's a very, very varied role which keeps you on your toes.