

## Hotwash Guide

**Background:** A Hotwash is a facilitated discussion to capture feedback about any issues, concerns or proposed improvements participants may have following an exercise, planned event or real-world incident.

**Purpose:** A Hotwash provides an opportunity for participants to discuss strengths and areas for improvement from an exercise, planned event, or real-world incident. The information gathered during a Hotwash can be used during the After-Action Report (AAR)/Improvement Plan (IP) process, and exercise suggestions can be used to improve future exercises.

Hotwashes allow time for participants to address key topics, cross-disciplinary issues or conflicting recommendations that were identified in earlier discussions. They are also an opportunity for participants to comment on how well the exercise was planned and conducted or how the real-world response was organized and flowed.

For this reason, Hotwashes afford a valuable opportunity for evaluators to fill in gaps in their notes so that a thorough capability analysis can be conducted.

**Timeline:** Hotwashes should be conducted as soon as possible after an exercise, planned event, or real-world incident has ended while events are still fresh in the participants' minds. Typically, with exercises, a Hotwash can be conducted by the evaluator or controller at the exercise venue immediately after it has concluded. With real-world incidents, Hotwashes should be conducted within three business days of the conclusion of incident response or at the earliest possible date.

**Facilitator:** All Hotwashes must have a facilitator. Hotwashes are most effective when led by an experienced facilitator who can keep the discussion focused, brief and constructive.

There are two common ways to conduct a Hotwash.

1. *General* – asking for all the strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement for the entire exercise, event or incident. Facilitating the Hotwash in a general way allows participants to bring about their own observations without prompting.
2. *Grouping* – asking for strengths, weakness and areas for improvement that share a theme or commonality. This would be continued for multiple topics such as water distributions, internal communication, external communication, etc.

**Process:** A Hotwash is designed to be a low-stress, no-fault environment. Varying viewpoints are expected and encouraged. During a Hotwash, participants should focus on systems, processes, plans, etc., and not specific people. A Hotwash is not a forum to blame individuals for mistakes, but to offer suggestions for improvement. Problems that are identified during the Hotwash are not expected to be solved, but problem should be noted for either an area of improvement or to be added to a parking lot. A parking lot is a list of items that do not fall within the scope of a Hotwash but should still be addressed at a later date. By creating a parking lot, the Hotwash may continue without getting off topic.

**Operational-Based Exercises:** For operations-based exercises [Functional Exercises, Full-Scale Exercises, Drills], a Hotwash should be conducted immediately following the exercise within each group or area. If this cannot occur, a Hotwash should be conducted within two (2) weeks following the exercises. The Hotwash can also provide an opportunity for players to gain clarification on exercise play at other exercise sites or in other functional areas.

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**Discussion-Based Exercises:** For discussion-based exercises (tabletop exercises), a Hotwash immediately follows the end of the exercise and is typically conducted by the Facilitator from the exercise.

**Real-World Incident:** For real-world incidents, a Hotwash should be conducted for each incident, especially when an After-Action Report/Improvement Plan (AAR/IP) is going to be written. Hotwashes provide an opportunity for reflection on events.

**Hotwash Presentation:** A visual aids is helpful for a Hotwash, but not required. Visual references, such as PowerPoints can be helpful when needing to summarize events (i.e. in real-world incidents) or providing prompting questions. Visual aids can be presentations, pictures, graphs, timeline of major incidents, etc.

An OSSC Hotwash PowerPoint Template is available [here](#).

**Notes:** Taking notes during a Hotwash are important and helps in capturing strengths, weakness, and areas of improvement that are identified by participants. The information captured will assist in the development of the after-action report and improvement plan and can assist evaluators in completing their exercise evaluator guides.

An OSSC Hotwash Note Template is available [here](#).

**Sign-In Sheet:** A sign-in sheet should be available for Hotwash participants when the Hotwash is not immediately following the exercise or event.

An OSSC Hotwash Sign-In Sheet Template is available [here](#).

### **Tips for conducting a Hotwash:**

- Review documents/notes from the exercise or event.
- Prepare prompting questions to help facilitate responses or discussion.
- Review Hotwash materials with the subject matter experts.
- Know your audience.

### **Additional Resources:**

- FEMA Independent Study Courses:
  - [IS-120: An Introduction to Exercises](#)
  - [IS-130: How to be an Exercise Evaluator](#)
  - [IS-139: Exercise Design and Development](#)
  - [IS-362: Multi-Hazard Emergency Planning for Schools](#)
- [Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Program \(HSEEP\)](#)