



WHITE PAPER

Disaster Deck

Run Better Tabletop Exercises with the Staff You Already Have

For emergency management leaders

September 2026

Everything's Fine: The Disaster Deck · www.thedisasterdeck.com

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Executive Summary

Every emergency management office knows it should exercise its plans more often, evaluate against core capabilities, and follow through on corrective actions. Few have the staff hours to do all of that well. A single tabletop exercise (TTX) can take weeks to design and weeks more to document, and exercises that end without an After-Action Report and Improvement Plan (AAR/IP) leave most of their value in the room.

Disaster Deck is a web-based platform that lets a small emergency management team design, run, evaluate, and document a facilitated, multi-group TTX in a fraction of the usual time. It is built around the Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Program (HSEEP 2020), uses the language exercise professionals expect, and turns what happens during play into the after-action products you need.

- **Design in hours, not weeks.** Start from a library of 104 ready-to-run scenarios, or build your own with optional AI drafting.
- **Engage every participant.** Groups work through the response on a structured game board, so every decision is visible, discussed, and recorded.
- **Evaluate consistently.** Each evaluator uses a capability-based Exercise Evaluation Guide (EEG) on a phone or laptop.
- **Leave with documentation.** Group debriefs, a hot wash guide, a draft Improvement Plan, and an HSEEP-style documentation package are generated from the exercise itself.

Our position on facilitation

No outside consultant needed. Your own staff facilitate, and Disaster Deck handles the design, injects, evaluation forms, and documentation.

The Challenge

County and city emergency management offices often run with two to five people who also handle plan maintenance, grants, training, public outreach, and real incidents. Under that load, exercise programs tend to show the same symptoms:

- Exercises happen less often than planned, or reuse last year's scenario.
- Scenarios are written quickly and do not stress the capabilities that most need testing.
- Discussion is dominated by a few voices, and decisions are spoken rather than recorded.
- Evaluation is informal, so observations are anecdotal instead of tied to objectives and capabilities.
- The AAR/IP arrives weeks later, or not at all, and corrective actions stall.
- Outside consultants fill the gap at a cost that is hard to budget every year.

The result is effort without improvement. Disaster Deck was built to close that gap.

What Disaster Deck Does

A guided path from design to close-out

The Guided Workshop walks your facilitator through five steps, each with a suggested timeframe, checklists, and autosave. For short-notice drills and training days, Quick Session skips design and gets groups playing in minutes.

Step	When	What you get
Set Up	2 to 4 weeks out	Exercise scope, date, location, participants, and number of groups
Build	2 to 4 weeks out	Your threat profile (THIRA hazards, target core capabilities, and objectives), then a library scenario matched to it or a custom scenario built for your jurisdiction; you choose which injects the exercise uses and how they are delivered
Prepare	About 2 weeks out	Exercise Plan (ExPlan), Situation Manual (SitMan), Evaluator Briefing with a sample EEG, Facilitator Guide with roles and a run of show, timeline, and venue and print checklists
Conduct	1 to 3 days out, then exercise day	Your session code, then a live dashboard showing every group, with facilitator-controlled inject delivery and evaluator progress
Evaluate	Exercise day and after	Hot wash guidance and notes, group and room debriefs, EEG results, a draft Improvement Plan, and the documentation package

A game board that makes decisions visible

Instead of a slide deck and open discussion, each group works on a shared board built around the incident. Teams choose response actions across five areas (operational response, resources and logistics, communication and information, public engagement and safety, and leadership and coordination), justify each choice in writing, and adapt as the facilitator delivers injects. Quiet participants have a concrete way to contribute, and every decision becomes part of the record.

Scenarios ready on day one

The library holds 104 scenarios across seven decks: All-Hazards, Weather and Natural Hazards, ESF Roles, Human-Caused Incidents, HAZMAT and Industrial, Cyber and Infrastructure, and a Local Government deck. Each includes a situation narrative, initial conditions, key stressors, training objectives, tagged core capabilities, and injects. Scenarios are set in Central City, a fictional jurisdiction in the style of FEMA course materials, so any community can adapt them.

Custom scenarios for your hazards

The Custom Scenario Builder lets you write a scenario around your own hazards, facilities, and plans. Describe the exercise in plain language and AI can propose a full draft, including injects, response actions, hazard tags, and core capabilities, which you review and edit before use. Every custom scenario carries a THIRA hazard profile and core capabilities, so they flow into your documents.

Built for a real conference room

- Runs in a standard web browser. Nothing to install.
- Participants and evaluators join with a session code or QR code. No participant accounts.
- One laptop per group, a facilitator laptop or projector, and evaluators on any phone or tablet.
- One facilitator can run several groups at once with consistent injects.
- Minimal staff: one facilitator runs the room. Add an evaluator for each group for HSEEP evaluation, and a controller to run the dashboard in a larger room.

Evaluation and Documentation

Disaster Deck captures the exercise as it happens: every action placed, every justification and note, every inject delivered, each player's self-assessment, and each evaluator's ratings. That record becomes your after-action products.

Product	What it gives you
Exercise Evaluation Guide	Per-group EEG with the HSEEP P/S/M/U ratings, observable tasks for each core capability, per-objective ratings, and evaluator observations
Player self-assessments	Individual strengths, areas to improve, and ratings, completed on the shared screen or by phone
Hot wash notes	The facilitator's record of what the room said in the hot wash, printed in the documentation package and used in the Improvement Plan
Group Debrief	A draft summary of each group's performance that the facilitator reviews, edits, and approves
Room Debrief	A hot wash guide with an opening statement, common strengths and challenges, discussion questions, and priority corrective actions
Improvement Plan	A draft IP with corrective actions tied to core capabilities, responsible positions, timeframes, and priority, ready for your After-Action Meeting
Documentation Package	An HSEEP-style package with overview, roster, group AARs, EEG results, IP, and sponsor sign-off, printable to paper or PDF

A close-out checklist on the facilitator dashboard shows what each document needs and what is ready, so nothing is missed at the end of a long day.

Consistent with HSEEP 2020

Disaster Deck is designed to be consistent with HSEEP 2020 doctrine for discussion-based exercises. It supports your exercise program; it does not replace your planning meetings, senior-leader engagement, or corrective-action tracking.

HSEEP element	How Disaster Deck supports it
Risk-informed design	THIRA hazard profile drives scenario selection and appears in the ExPlan
Objectives and core capabilities	Set once and carried through the ExPlan, SitMan, EEG, and documentation package
Exercise documents	ExPlan, SitMan, Evaluator Briefing, and Facilitator Guide generated from your design
Facilitated discussion	Multi-group sessions with facilitator-controlled injects and a live dashboard
Standardized evaluation	Capability-based EEG with P/S/M/U ratings
Hot wash	Guided hot wash steps, questions, and a room debrief
AAR/IP	Documentation package and a draft Improvement Plan for your After-Action Meeting

Exercise records an agency creates may be public records under state law. Disaster Deck is not intended to be your official records system; export or print the documentation package into your own records.

Responsible Use of AI

AI helps draft custom scenarios, debriefs, and the Improvement Plan. It never runs the exercise, delivers injects, rates performance, or makes decisions. Evaluator ratings are always entered by a person. When the facilitator generates an AI document, exercise content is sent to Anthropic, including self-assessments, evaluator observations, and hot wash notes; email addresses and account identifiers are not.

- **Optional.** The AI drafts (debriefs and the Improvement Plan) are optional. The ExPlan, SitMan, Evaluator Briefing, Facilitator Guide, EEG, and documentation package need no AI, and exercises can be run, evaluated, and documented without it.
- **Grounded.** Drafts are based on your scenario and what was captured during your exercise.

- **Facilitator-owned.** AI documents are generated and reviewed by the facilitator, not shown directly to participants, and group debriefs can be edited before use.
- **Transparent.** We publish what is sent to our AI provider (Anthropic) on our Security page. Names typed into player or evaluator fields can be included, so we recommend role titles.

Security and Data

Disaster Deck runs on Vercel and on Supabase (PostgreSQL on AWS, US East region). All connections are encrypted with TLS, data is encrypted at rest, and card payments are handled entirely by Stripe. Your account and saved workshops are restricted to your account. Custom scenarios can only be changed by you; once you host one in a session, anyone with that session's link can read it.

We are candid about where we are. Live exercise session data is not yet restricted to the people in that session, so we ask customers to use role titles or made-up names during exercises until that work is complete. It is scheduled ahead of any exercise with real names. Our public Security page describes current controls in plain language, and a security brief for IT reviewers is available on request.

Plans

Plan	Annual price	Facilitators	Best for
Free	\$0	1	Trying the full live game with demo scenarios, one group per session, watermarked documents
Small Local Government	\$2,995	3	Jurisdictions under 50,000 residents: full library, unlimited exercises, clean documents, custom builder with AI drafting, multi-group hosting
Local Government / Agency	\$4,995	5	Any single county, city, or agency, with 12-month session history and priority support
Regional / State	Contact us	Unlimited	Multi-jurisdiction deployment, centralized reporting, custom scenario development, custom terms

Plans are annual and do not auto-renew. If you would rather have us run the exercise, facilitated engagements start at \$2,500.

Why Disaster Deck

Instead of	You get
Weeks of scenario writing	A ready scenario library and a guided custom builder
A slide deck and open discussion	A structured board where every group decision is visible and recorded
Evaluators with blank notepads	A capability-based EEG on every evaluator's phone
An AAR written from memory weeks later	Debriefs and a draft IP generated from what happened in the room
A consultant for every exercise	Your own staff facilitating with professional materials

Next Steps

1. **Try it.** Create a free account at www.thedisasterdeck.com and play a demo scenario with your team.
2. **See it run.** Request a walkthrough and we will run a live exercise with your staff.
3. **Review it.** Ask for our IT security brief for your technology and procurement reviewers.

Contact us through www.thedisasterdeck.com/contact.