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WHITE PAPER: Meeting Strategic Communications Virtual Solutions Requirements during COVID-19 Response For Nuclear Power Plants and Offsite Response Organizations

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WHITE PAPER:
Meeting Strategic Communications Virtual Solutions
Requirements during COVID-19 Response
for
Nuclear Power Plants and Offsite Response Organizations

Introduction: A global pandemic, civil unrest, and a volatile political climate have exposed the need for more advanced and strategic communication in uncertain times. Summit Exercises and Training (SummitET®) recognizes the uniqueness of strategic communications, particularly when communicating crisis and emergency risk communication (CERC). Radiation is a topic that is widely misunderstood and requires specialized CERC skills to address pre-crisis, crisis, and post-crisis messaging in order to meet stakeholder informational needs.

It is important for nuclear power plants and Offsite Response Organizations (OROs) to develop and practice effective strategic communication to meet training and exercise requirements such as:

- NUREG-0654 FEMA-REP-1, *Criteria for Preparation and Evaluation of Radiological Emergency Response Plans and Preparedness in Support of Nuclear Power Plants*;
- Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Radiological Emergency Preparedness Exercise Criteria identified in the Federal Registry *Radiological Emergency Preparedness: Exercise Evaluation Methodology* (66 FR 47526-47546); and
- State, local, and tribal requirements.

Response to COVID-19 has presented challenges in meeting training and exercise requirements since many in-person activities are not an option, however, SummitET has successfully made the pivot from in-person to virtual engagements to meet its customer's mission requirements. SummitET's Strategic Communications Program offers exercise solutions and training presented through its Strategic Communications Institute for Preparedness (SCIP), delivered by experts, including a Certified Health Physicist, with extensive knowledge of the unique challenges presented by a radiation emergency. This white paper describes SummitET's virtual and hybrid training exercise solutions for nuclear power plants and OROs. These training and exercise solutions enhance strategic communications and address CERC principles such as effectiveness, consistency, and proficiency for a FEMA-evaluated exercise and when communicating technical information to non-technical audiences.

Challenge: To meet regulatory requirements as outlined in *10 CFR 50.47(b)(7)*; *44 CFR 350.5(a)(7)*, training and exercise activities are conducted to ensure public education and information meet planning standards and evaluation criteria. Due to the inability of many nuclear power plants and OROs to hold in-person training and exercises, this requirement calls for an alternative approach. According to *NUREG-0654/FEMA-REP-1, Rev. 2*, "Alternative approaches provide an opportunity for state, local, and tribal governments, applicants, and licensees to meet the planning standards in a manner that is different from what the evaluation criteria recommend..." SummitET offers alternative approaches to meet training and exercise requirements using virtual and hybrid learning and exercise environments.

Strategic communications and CERC are an essential part of managing radiation emergencies. CERC fosters a common understanding of issues, protects public health and safety, and preserves

organizational efficacy. Evidence-based CERC research and technical expertise make a critical difference in mitigating loss, maintaining trust and credibility, and strengthening relationships with stakeholders. All emergencies have a crisis and risk management component, yet there are few existing courses that teach both crisis AND risk communication. Scholars define risk communication as a science-based approach for communicating effectively in situations of high stress, high concern, or controversy. The Centers for Disease Control defines crisis communication as the process of providing facts to the public about an emergency, beyond an organization's control, that involves the organization and requires an immediate response. The crisis may cause harm to an organization's reputation or viability. In real-world emergencies and training exercises, effective communication continues to be identified as a gap. Particularly, communicating scientific information of science-related information can be an even greater challenge. Organizations should integrate CERC into incident response. CERC integration improves outcomes by effectively engaging stakeholders and promoting a coordinated communication response.

In a high-consequence scenario, both internal and external communications should be addressed. The ability to work with stakeholders such as transient populations, those with access and functional needs, regulatory agencies, and employees is critical for an effective communication response. Failure to adequately communicate risk serves to exacerbate the potential for miscommunication. Consequently, it is critical for nuclear power plants and OROs to collaborate with subject-matter experts to develop strategic communication and integrate CERC skills and processes for planning and performance in a crisis scenario. Particularly during COVID-19 response, the ability to deliver in-person training and conduct exercises has been drastically hampered, although training and exercise must continue to be conducted.

Solution: SummitET® experts are recognized as leading professionals in the development of strategic communications programs and hosts the SCIP, which offers in-person, virtual and hybrid training programs that extend beyond typical baseline training offered for those responsible for communicating prevention, protection, mitigation, response, and recovery information for radiation emergencies. Our subject-matter experts are highly experienced, trained, and internationally known, current, and former communications professionals. Our team is comprised of a Certified Health Physicist with over 20 years' experience responding to domestic and international radiation emergencies. Other subject-matter experts are experienced in radiation emergency response, strategic communications, state/local government and private sector emergency management, preparedness planning, federal law enforcement, and hazardous materials. They are skilled in helping organizations assess, plan, and build capacity to effectively manage and message internal and external communications for all-hazards and threats. This includes developing strategies for CERC communications, reputation management, digital and social media, internal communications, community education, and media relations practice. SummitET's programs include a wide range of trainings, drills, tabletops (TTXs) and practical exercises designed to prepare communicators and senior leaders through informed, innovative, and dynamic instruction offered nationally and internationally.

SummitET currently leverages virtual training in an online, interactive, and participatory virtual classroom for the Department of Energy/National Nuclear Security Administration (DOE/NNSA). We assist sites across the DOE/NNSA enterprise to effectively integrate CERC into their communication strategies. This training delivery format has successfully positioned the DOE/NNSA enterprise to follow CDC's COVID-19 guidelines by protecting its workforce, customers, and meet mission requirements.



Using virtual training environments, SummitET® can transition and customize nuclear power plants and OROs' training requirements, enhance strategic communications, and employ decision-makers and communicators with CERC proficiency.

SummitET®'s SCIP also offers a hybrid training model where a segment of participants attends in-person classes, at a facility with appropriate social distancing and safety measures, while other participants join the workshop virtually. This model combines traditional classroom experiences, experiential learning objectives, and digital course delivery using the best option(s) for each learning objective.

SummitET's virtual and hybrid trainings and exercises provide a learning environment to promote strategic communication and CERC skill development among nuclear power plants and OROs to:

- ✓ Improve internal CERC skills and standardize response procedures across the spectrum of nuclear power plants and OROs to address stakeholder communities, transient populations, and those with access and functional needs.
- ✓ Develop innovative processes grounded in evidence-based research and industry best practices.
- ✓ Deliver strategic communications and CERC training and workshops using virtual and hybrid learning environments to meet requirements.

About Us: SummitET® is a veteran-owned small business specializing in preparedness solutions for organizations, businesses, all levels of government agencies, as well as an extensive list of international clients. Our personnel come from the military, emergency management, CERC, fire rescue, law enforcement, federal service, and health physics communities. Our customized solutions and services preserve lives and property through planning, preparation, prevention, mitigation, and response to technical, manmade, and natural disasters. SummitET® provides training, exercises, and technical consulting in the following core areas:

- ✓ Radiation Emergency Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication
- ✓ Workplace Violence and Active Shooter
- ✓ CBRNE, WMD, or Terrorism
- ✓ Critical Infrastructure, Red Cell, and Emerging Threats
- ✓ Cybersecurity
- ✓ Business Continuity

Call to Action: Given SummitET's expertise in radiation emergency strategic communications, CERC, and health physics and the SCIP, which provides in-person, virtual and hybrid learning environments for advanced training programs that extend beyond typical baseline training for communicators, we offer the opportunity to guide nuclear power plants and OROs through a variety of scenarios unique to the community. The SummitET® team has cultivated relationships with the private sector, federal, state, local, and tribal governments and is positioned to design, deliver, and conduct training and exercises with an interagency, intragovernmental, and cross-sector approach. Our technical subject-matter expertise and real-world experience in radiation emergency strategic communication and CERC effectively prepare individual participants and their organizations to meet training and exercise requirements.



Our approach engages nuclear power plants and OROs in a process using multiple, active learning techniques, blended learning theories, and leveraging instruction and facilitation by experienced staff. SummitET caters to the unique needs of each audience, providing the appropriate introductory, theoretical, and practical knowledge and performance-based skill development for capacity building. We provide participants with customized materials to guide them through their learning experience in a virtual or hybrid learning environment. Strategic communication offerings can be coordinated with virtual TTXs (discussion-based) exercises to help integrate this important capability into the overall response.

Contacts: Additional information regarding SummitET's expertise can be obtained by contacting individuals listed below or through our website <https://summitet.com/contact-us/>

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