TABLETOP EXERCISE: STORM THAT CAUSES SERIOUS INFRASTRUCTURE DAMAGE

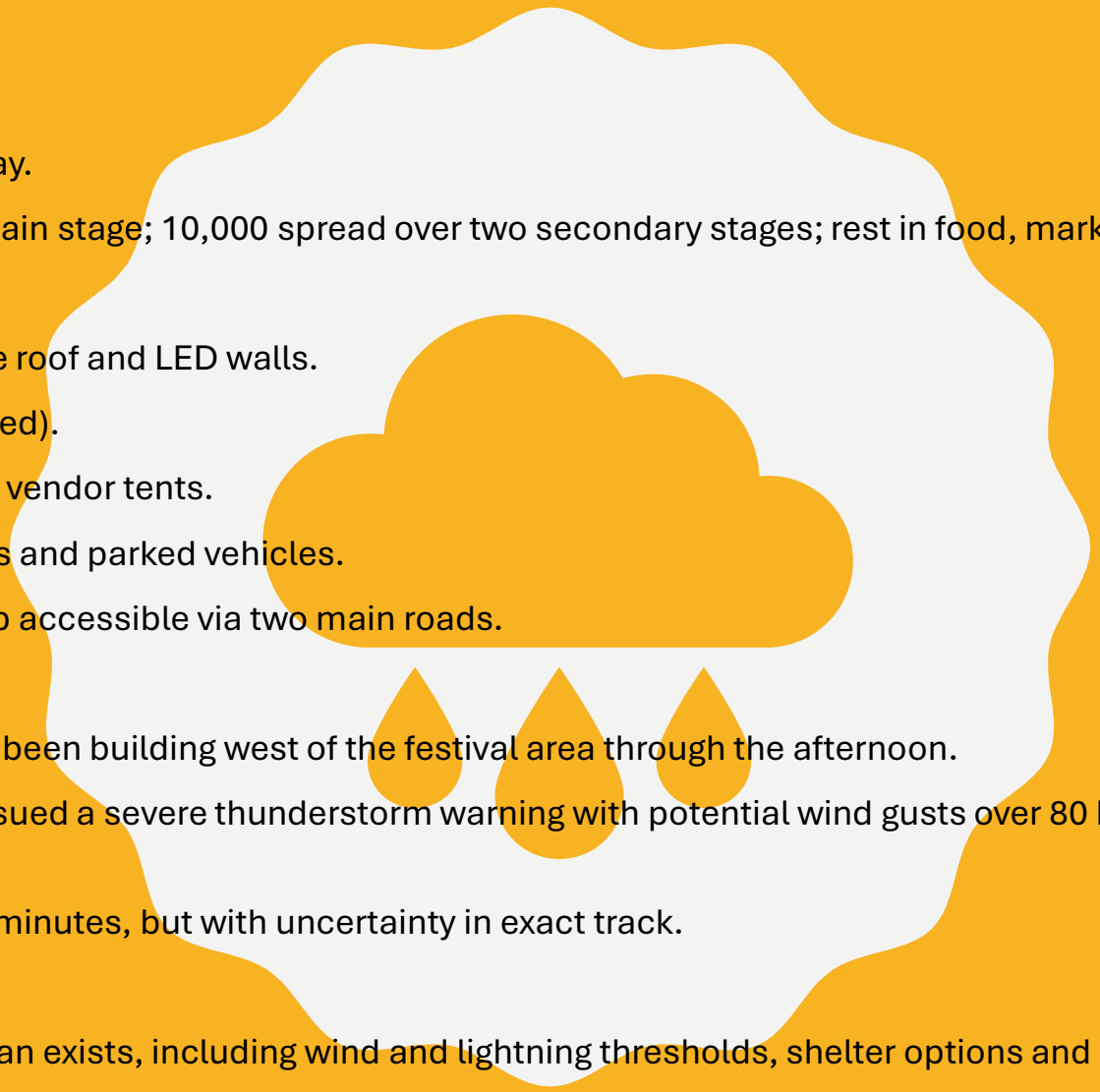
Scenario overview

- **Exercise type**: Discussion-based tabletop
- **Focus**: Storm impact on temporary and permanent infrastructure; decision-making on show stops, shelter/evacuation, and degraded site operations.
- **Objectives**:
  - Test thresholds and procedures for suspending shows and securing structures in high winds and lightning.
  - Practise managing loss or damage of critical infrastructure (stages, tents, power, access roads).
  - Clarify communication and coordination with contractors and authorities during and after damage.
  - Use each inject as a separate discussion round (10–20 minutes each) with maps and a simple damage overlay you can sketch on a whiteboard.
  - Keep questions focused on decisions, roles, and infrastructure consequences rather than technical weather details.
  - In the debrief, explicitly track: where infrastructure limits were unclear, where thresholds for stopping shows were ambiguous, and where communication around damaged areas broke down.

Background setting (pre-read or opening brief)

Time and context:

- Mid-summer, Saturday, 18:00.
- Multi-day open-air festival, peak day.
- 40,000 visitors on site; 20,000 at main stage; 10,000 spread over two secondary stages; rest in food, market, and campsite areas.
- Site includes:
  - Main open-air stage with large roof and LED walls.
  - Two medium stages (one tented).
  - Market street with lightweight vendor tents.
  - Campsite with light structures and parked vehicles.
  - Car parks and shuttle bus hub accessible via two main roads.



Weather situation:

- A strong line of thunderstorms has been building west of the festival area through the afternoon.
- National meteorological service issued a severe thunderstorm warning with potential wind gusts over 80 km/h, heavy rain, lightning, and localised hail.
- Forecast suggests arrival in 60–90 minutes, but with uncertainty in exact track.

Key plans in force:

- Written weather and evacuation plan exists, including wind and lightning thresholds, shelter options and evacuation routes, and communication templates.
- Contractors have provided wind-load certificates for stages and key structures, but not all vendors are professionally engineered.

Inject 1 – Warning escalates (T-60 minutes)

Time in scenario: 18:00.

Information to read out:

- **Updated meteorological bulletin upgrades the storm to “severe” with destructive potential: gusts locally above 90 km/h, frequent cloud-to-ground lightning, and torrential rain possible within 45–60 minutes.**
- **Radar images show the main convective line moving steadily toward the festival.**
- **Winds on site are still moderate; sky is darkening in the west, and some visitors are posting pictures of the clouds.**
- **All stages are running; the headliner on the main stage is due at 19:30.**
- **Ingress continues; about 3,000 people are in queues at the main entrance and shuttle hub.**

Discussion prompts:

- **What is your posture now: normal, enhanced monitoring, or partial readiness?**
- **Which pre-emptive actions do you take in the next 10–15 minutes (e.g. securing décor, checking ballast, briefing stage managers, pausing certain activities)?**
- **Do you communicate with visitors yet? If yes, what message, via which channels?**

Inject 2 – Onset of strong winds (T-30 minutes)

Advance time to 18:30.

Information:

- **First storm cells arrive with gusts around 60 km/h and light rain.**
- **Flags, banners, and some lightweight promotional elements start flapping violently; one small sponsor arch partially collapses near a secondary bar, no injuries.**
- **The severe thunderstorm warning is now specifically naming the festival's municipality for impact within 30 minutes.**
- **Security reports some visitors moving from open areas to tented bar zones and the tented stage for shelter.**
- **Traffic management notes slower car movements as rain increases; some minor puddling on access road shoulders.**

Discussion prompts:

- **Do you stop or suspend any performances at this point? Which ones and based on what thresholds?**
- **What instructions go to vendors regarding their tents, flags, and temporary structures?**
- **How do you prevent crowding in structurally vulnerable tents as people self-seek shelter?**

Infrastructure angle:

- **Ask specifically: who is responsible for assessing tented structures and stages; what is the process if a structure exceeds its safe wind rating?**

Inject 3 – Direct storm impact and structural damage (T0)

Advance time to 18:50.

Information:

- **A severe gust front hits the site with winds estimated 90–100 km/h for a brief period, heavy rain, and frequent lightning strikes within 5–10 km.**
- **The following infrastructure damage is reported within minutes:**
  - **The tented secondary stage: part of the canvas tears; one corner pole dislodges, causing partial roof collapse over the rear audience area. Several people fall; possible injuries, unknown severity.**
  - **Market street: 15–20 lightweight vendor tents have flipped or collapsed; debris and metal poles on the ground; narrow passage partly blocked.**
  - **Power: one distribution sub-panel near the main stage trips; half of the site lighting and some PA towers lose power, including parts of the main stage FOH delay towers.**
  - **Access: a large tree has fallen across one of the two main access roads; local police report that road is temporarily blocked in both directions. The other road remains open but is congested.**
  - **Communications: cellular network performance degrades as people start calling or streaming; radio system is still operational.**

Discussion prompts:

- **Immediate priorities in the first 5–10 minutes: what do you do first, and why?**
- **How do you:**
  - **Protect people around the damaged tented stage and market area?**
  - **Decide whether to order an immediate show stop on all stages?**
  - **Manage the partial power loss at the main stage (dark areas, PA drop-outs)?**
- **With one access road blocked and heavy rain, do you consider shelter-in-place vs. evacuation? How do you decide?**

Infrastructure decisions:

- **Who can declare specific structures unsafe, and what is the procedure (technical inspection, engineer, contractor rep)?**
- **How do you create no-go zones and route crowds around damaged areas with debris and fallen tents?**

Inject 4 – Secondary failures and constrained resources (T+20 minutes)

Advance time to 19:10.

Information:

- **Rain remains heavy; lightning continues intermittently. Winds have eased but are still gusty.**
- **Medical teams report:**
  - **1–2 suspected serious injuries at the tented stage (head injury, suspected fracture).**
  - **Several minor injuries from flying debris and slips in muddy areas.**
- **The power contractor reports:**
  - **The tripped sub-panel can be reset, but they are concerned about water ingress into one cable trench near market street; re-energising may be unsafe without inspection.**
- **Police and fire report:**
  - **The blocked access road will take at least 60 minutes to clear due to multiple downed trees and power lines nearby.**
  - **Regional ambulance service is busy with other storm-related incidents; response capacity is limited.**
- **Social media and messaging app chatter show conflicting information, including rumours that "a stage has collapsed" and that "the festival is being evacuated".**

Discussion prompts:

- **Do you transition into a partial or full site evacuation, or maintain controlled shelter-in-place in defined areas? Why?**
- **How do you:**
  - **Communicate a clear, unified message to visitors about what has happened and what to do?**
  - **Prioritise emergency vehicle access with one road blocked and mud forming in car parks?**
  - **Decide which areas of the site are closed for the rest of the event (e.g. tented stage, market street)?**

Infrastructure-specific:

- **What is your process for declaring damaged zones out of service and physically securing them (barriers, lighting, signage)?**
- **How do you handle loss of one power sector if re-energising is unsafe: which systems get backup (lighting, PA, medical, command)?**

Inject 5 – Transition to recovery (T+90 minutes)

Advance time to 20:20.

Information:

- **The main storm band has passed. Rain has eased to light showers; lightning risk decreasing according to meteorological guidance.**
- **Initial structural assessment:**
  - **Tented stage: significant damage; not safe for further use without repair and inspection.**
  - **Market street: many tents destroyed; debris cleared from main thoroughfares but trading cannot safely resume for most vendors.**
  - **Power: some circuits restored; temporary lighting and PA can be run on remaining generators, but redundancy is reduced.**
- **Authorities (police, fire, building inspector) are on site and request a coordinated briefing.**
- **Media outlets are calling the press office with reports of "storm chaos at festival".**

Discussion prompts:

- **Do you:**
  - **Resume a reduced programme on the main stage only?**
  - **Cancel the remainder of the day's programme?**
  - **Begin a phased site clearance?**
- **What are your criteria for each option (infrastructure safety, medical capacity, weather outlook, transport, public order)?**
- **How do you manage:**
  - **Media and social media messaging about damage and injuries?**
  - **Communication with families of injured persons, and with staff/volunteers?**
  - **Early planning for the next festival day (can it continue, with what limitations)?**

Infrastructure and lessons:

- **What immediate actions are needed to stabilise damaged infrastructure overnight (e.g. further securing structures, fencing off zones, drainage)?**
- **Which infrastructure failures were most critical, and what changes would you prioritise (design, contracts, staging, redundancy) before the next season?**