PLANNING SERIES · PLN-11

PLN-11 — After Action

Hotwash · After Action Report · Root Cause · POETE · Improvement Plan

Turns every watch, warning, drill, and activation into tested fixes, so the same failure doesn't come back next season.

BOTTOM LINE UP FRONT

An after action review is a structured look at how your household or group's system performed during an event, followed by assigned, tested fixes for what didn't work. It is not a storytelling debrief and not a search for someone to blame: it examines plans, assignments, equipment, training, and practice. And it applies to routine weather watches and warnings, not only to disasters.

WHY THIS MATTERS

A minor event tests the same system a major one will.

Every watch or warning runs your alerting, notification, communications, plans, and equipment for real, with no notice and nobody prepped. Most groups conclude "that went fine" because nobody was hurt, and the silent radio, the stalled phone tree, and the dead flashlight wait for the next, faster storm.

> *Good outcomes from a weak system are the most dangerous result you can get, because they teach everyone that the system works.*

THE FIVE POETE ELEMENTS

Planning	Written plans, procedures, triggers, and checklists. Fixed by writing or revising a procedure.
Organization	Who is assigned and who owns what. Fixed by naming an owner or a role.
Equipment	Devices and supplies and their condition. Fixed by acquiring, repairing, or replacing.
Training	What people know and can do. Fixed by teaching a skill and confirming it took.
Exercises	Whether it has been tested under realistic conditions. Fixed by drilling it.

COURSE LESSONS

01	**Why Evaluate the Small Ones** Why every watch and warning is a free live exercise, when to run a review, and how to scale it.
02	**The AAR Process: Hotwash to Improvement Plan** The three-step process, the four questions every review answers, and ground rules that make honesty safe.
03	**Capturing What Happened** Building an event timeline from records and separating observations from findings, including strengths.
04	**Root Cause Analysis** The 5 Whys, a fishbone for outcomes with several causes, and the rule for when to stop asking why.
05	**POETE: Sorting Findings Into Fixes** Sorting each root cause by the kind of fix it needs, and reading the pattern across findings.
06	**The Improvement Plan: Closing the Loop** Corrective actions with one owner, a date, and a test, prioritized and verified before the next event.
07	**Capstone: Your Event AAR/IP** A complete review of a real event from your own household or group, plus a twice-yearly pre-season review.

REFERENCE FRAMEWORKS

Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Program (2020)	FEMA	Hotwash and AAR/IP structure
THIRA and SPR Guide (CPG 201)	FEMA	POETE capability elements
After action review method	US Army	The four review questions
5 Whys; cause-and-effect diagram	Toyota; Kaoru Ishikawa	Root cause methods
Watch and warning definitions	NOAA National Weather Service	Alert terminology