

Disaster day

A simulated incident response exercise

What is Disaster Day?

- A simulated incident response exercise, similar to a fire drill or wheel of misfortune
- The facilitator introduces the team to the exercise and triggers an incident
- The team responds to the incident: triage, mitigate, find the root cause
- After the incident has been mitigated, the team collectively writes a post-mortem to analyze the incident and gather learnings and follow-up action items
- Designed for teams that are at a beginner or intermediate level of maturity in infrastructure operations / incident response.
- Can be run as a stand-alone exercise as part of a project

Why conduct a Disaster Day?

- The incident response exercise demonstrates the value and gaps in alerting, tracing, metrics and other observability tools, playbooks and pre-defined incident response processes, even to non-technical stakeholders.
- The incident response validates the teams understanding of the software and the environment as well as incident response processes and documentation.
- Incident response may also provide new insights into how the application runs in the environment, for example by revealing hidden dependencies.
- A simulated incident teaches real incident response skills in a safe environment.
- Teambuilding: an incident response exercise helps bring the team together.

When to conduct a Disaster Day

- To conduct a disaster day, you need
 - A shared environment that you care about (for example a development environment)
 - A team of willing engineers to participate in the exercise. If working with a large team (8+ participants), consider establishing coordinator and timeline-keeper roles beforehand.
 - A facilitator for the exercise
 - An OK to break the environment
- A single exercise usually requires 2-4h, including writing the post-mortem. At least half a day should be reserved for the disaster day.
- Disaster day can be run on-site or virtually. On-site is preferred, but virtual works too

Disaster day resources

- <https://sre.google/sre-book/emergency-response#test-induced-emergency>
- <https://learning.oreilly.com/library/view/practice-of-cloud/9780133478549/ch15.html>