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School Evacuation Planning: Using Absolute Enrollment Numbers When Requesting Transportation Assets

SUMMARY

Emergency planners should encourage school administrators to use absolute enrollment numbers rather than daily attendance figures when calculating the number of buses required for a safe and efficient evacuation. Compiling and submitting daily attendance numbers may cause unacceptable delays in requesting and receiving transportation support.

DESCRIPTION

On December 16, 2004, approximately 1,500 students from 17 schools in Vermont's Windham Southeast Supervisory Union school district participated in a full-scale evacuation exercise. The exercise tested the region's ability to rapidly and simultaneously evacuate the students to a high school approximately 25 miles away.

The existing evacuation plan required school administrators to submit daily attendance numbers to determine how many buses were needed for the evacuation. This presented a significant obstacle for many schools, however. School administrators took longer than expected to compile their attendance numbers, which delayed the submission of transportation requests. Exercise evaluators determined the response time was unacceptable, and recommended that the school district use absolute enrollment numbers instead of daily attendance figures.

On February 15, 2005, local officials conducted a second evacuation drill without students; this one tested the bus dispatch system in isolation. To expedite the initial request for buses, the school district utilized the absolute enrollment numbers for the 17 schools involved. Because these numbers were readily available and did not require any calculations, school administrators could submit their transportation requests immediately. The supporting bus companies quickly dispatched 72 buses to the designated schools and reduced response time by approximately 40 minutes.

Emergency planners should encourage school administrators to use absolute enrollment numbers rather than daily attendance figures when calculating the number of buses required for a safe and efficient evacuation. Compiling and submitting daily attendance numbers may cause unacceptable delays in requesting and receiving transportation support.

CITATIONS

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