



LESSONS LEARNED

From School Crises and Emergencies



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EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT PLANNING FOR AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS **Focus: Napa County Office of Education**

Napa County has had 15 presidentially declared disasters in the last 25 years and the next one can happen at any time. For the 1,000 or so students who take advantage of the multiple after-school programs offered across 18 sites, and spend an average of three hours per day on school grounds after the school day has ended, there is a measurable and real risk that a natural or man-made disaster can occur while they are in our care.—Neal O’Haire, FY 2008 REMS grant coordinator, Napa County Office of Education

Many schools offer after-school programs for students from their school or other area youths. These may include extended day child care, academic enrichment activities, cultural arts, recreational activities, sports teams, or even adult education classes. In addition, numerous types of events occur on school grounds after school hours, such as concerts, plays, sports, and dances. However, many schools and school districts overlook the need to include these after-school programs in their emergency management planning efforts, even though youths and adults are still present on campus after school, and even though a crisis event may just as easily occur after school as during the school day. After-school programs may also present unique considerations for emergency management planning, including the likelihood for paraprofessionals, older youths, or college students who are not otherwise affiliated with the school to be the persons in charge (e.g., as coaches, arts directors, club staff, custodians, etc.) instead of teachers or administrators. These after-school program staff may not have

awareness of the potential for an emergency to happen, may not be familiar with school facilities and grounds, or may not be trained to respond appropriately should an emergency event occur.

Several factors have allowed Napa County officials to see the value of after-school emergency management planning. Napa County Office of Education (NCOE) staff recognized a need to incorporate after-school programs and staff into school emergency management planning following a significant increase in after-school programs (due to grants from California Proposition 49 of 2002) and addressed the need during their second Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) grant from the U.S. Department of Education. The district realized that staff members and clients remaining on the campus until 6 p.m. should have the necessary training to more effectively safeguard the students, according to Terry Longoria, NCOE’s director of the School and Community Partnership Project.

NCOE implemented the Community Emergency Response Team’s (CERT) national standard curriculum to train both staff and students in Napa. To date, NCOE has trained over 250 maintenance and operations staff members from the county’s school districts, and over 300 students have been trained in this program, many in the after-school program. Training of both teachers and students was conducted during the day and after school, explained Neal O’Haire, the FY 2008 REMS grant coordinator

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for NCOE. “It is really helpful when the teachers can reinforce the [CERT] program, and see the value in it. ... There are a lot of components when you talk about disasters and how they affect society that fit into the school day curriculum,” said O’Haire.

CERT blends knowledge with hands-on skills to give an individual the tools they need to help themselves, and their friends, family, and school in an emergency. The course empowers both staff and students and helps them prepare to be not only a victim but also a victim-responder. Additionally, staff and students trained in this program can leverage their skills to direct others on how to respond in a crisis, improving first-line responses to a major incident or disaster. “We felt it was important to train students to be self-reliant,” said Longoria. “We are looking at after-school programs because we have so many parents who work out of the area that, in the event of a disaster or other emergency, kids could actually be spending the night at the school. The kids need to be prepared themselves.”

O’Haire says, “One of the qualities of a good after-school program is that it reflects the learning environment of the school’s day program, and including emergency management planning in both is an important part of culture-building.” The Napa County after-school program emergency management training is conducted by a cadre of five trainers, including O’Haire, formerly a member of a national CERT training team from the Emergency Management Institute of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

NCOE uses the Teen CERT curriculum, which is modeled on the adult curriculum but is appropriate for 11–14 year olds, to train students. Youths are trained on a variety of skills, including on how to put out small fires with an extinguisher and how to recognize when a fire is too large to handle on their own. Each

CERT class ends with a mini-disaster drill, and students practice tasks such as finding victims and transporting them to a medical site.

Additionally, NCOE’s after-school programs are provided go-kits and staff training in emergency response. The district’s staff is taught how to use the kits and about the site emergency plans. Emergency communication plans for contacting outside help are posted, as well as checklists in every school room on how to respond to 17 different possible hazards present on campus. According to O’Haire, NCOE “views preparedness in our after-school programs as a combination of staff knowledge, skills and abilities, realistic training and appropriate first-response equipment.”

During spring 2009, a districtwide full-scale exercise was held in Napa County. Twenty-five parent volunteers were enlisted to help the schools walk through the parent reunification system during the drill. “The kids that helped them do it [and] that made it such a success were twenty-two 6th graders who had been CERT trained,” O’Haire said. These students knew their peers on campus and were able to help account for others, as well as escort them from the staging area to the reunification site. Longoria agreed: “If it weren’t for the [Teen] CERT graduates, [staff] wouldn’t even know how to set up the first aid area,” said the teachers.”

During the fall, a real emergency situation arose at a school when a patient escaped from the nearby state mental hospital, requiring execution of lockdown procedures during after-school hours. At the time, an after-school program was operating, including recreational and enrichment support run by the City of Napa Parks and Recreation Services Department. Fortunately, program staff had been trained in response procedures and executed the lockdown, as needed, to keep the youths safe.

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When asked how they would advise other schools and local education agencies (LEAs) to implement and improve emergency management planning for after-school programs, NCOE staff recommended the following:

- Encourage community participation to help facilitate this effort. NCOE staff recommends enlisting parent groups to rally support or pull together community interest and funding. For NCOE, their emergency management planning was part of a larger community collaborative, including the contributions of many CERT volunteers.
- Ensure after-school programs are educated on key parts of emergency management planning, including keeping emergency contact cards up to date and having the most accurate information from parents on who youths are permitted to leave with.
- Utilize grant funding opportunities, where possible, to improve emergency management planning efforts, such as with the REMS grant.
- Enlist the assistance of local CERT programs.

“I would love to see the [Teen] CERT curriculum be implemented in schools nationwide,” O’Haire remarked. “They really [teach] life skills.” For now, these life skills help teachers, staff, students, and after-school programs keep youths safe on school campuses in Napa County from the time they arrive to the time they leave, regardless of whether school is in session.

Additional Resources on After-School Program Emergency Management Planning

After-school programs are often contained within a school’s overall emergency management plan. However, there are important emergency planning considerations specific to after-school programs that may not be addressed in the school’s overall emergency management plan, such as:

- How the Incident Command Structure is to operate after school when most staff have left for the day;
- Training of after-school program staff;
- Emergency procedures, especially when some buildings may be closed; and
- Coordination with local emergency responders.

Similar to emergency management planning for schools, after-school programs should also develop plans based upon site-specific issues. Collaborative exercises, site assessments, needs assessments, inventories, meetings, and emergency exercises, including drills and tabletops, would also assist in validating and encouraging adoption of the plan by administrators while promoting sustainability over time. Following is additional information, guidance, and resources for developing emergency plans for after-school programs.

The Washington State School Safety Center developed a PowerPoint presentation titled “*Recommended Emergency Preparedness for After-School Programs*” (January 2009). This center recommends that after-school programs:

- Parallel the schools’ plans and procedures, or incorporate their plans into the schools’ plans;
- Consult others (rather than plan in a vacuum);
- Include important contact numbers in their plans;
- Include reunification plans;
- Identify personnel for key roles;
- Orient all staff to the plan; and
- Have the plan available at all times.

To access the PowerPoint presentation, visit www.k12.wa.us/21stCenturyLearning/pubdocs/RecEmergencyPrepAfterSchoolPrograms.ppt.

Denver Public Schools developed the 12-step “DPS Emergency Management Plan for After-School Programs” in which the programs are asked to: identify a school command post to serve as a base for operations and communication resources in the event of an emergency; assign emergency response team roles; and review procedures for shelter-in-place and evacuation, as well as identify two off-campus evacuation locations within walking distance. Other focus areas include emergency response kits, parent reunification procedures, and preparedness for people with disabilities. The template is available online at <http://static.dpsk12.org/gems/ercm/2007DPSERCMTemplateforAfterHrProgramsSept07.doc>.

The Orange County (Calif.) Department of Education also developed emergency guidelines for after-school programs, including suggestions on how to respond before, during, and after an emergency. These guidelines can be accessed online at <http://emergency.ocde.us/workshops.htm>.

For more information on CERT, visit <https://www.citizencorps.gov/cert/>.

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The REMS TA Center was established in October 2007 by the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools (OSDFS). The center supports schools and school districts in developing and implementing comprehensive emergency management plans by providing technical assistance via trainings, publications and individualized responses to requests. For additional information about school emergency management topics, visit the REMS TA Center at <http://rems.ed.gov> or call 1-866-540-REMS (7367). For information about the REMS grant program, contact Tara Hill (tara.hill@ed.gov) or Sara Strizzi (sara.strizzi@ed.gov).

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