



HELPFULHINTS

FOR SCHOOL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

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UPDATING AND MAINTAINING SCHOOL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT PLANS

New Webcast: School Safety

In the wake of recent school shootings and President Bush's White House Conference on School Safety, the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools presented a one-hour webcast on Nov. 15, 2006, to provide parents, educators, school administrators and local law enforcement personnel with an opportunity to review the key components of school emergency management planning. OSDFS staff shared successful strategies so that those responsible for ensuring the safety of students, faculty and staff could learn more about what schools can do to help mitigate, prevent, prepare for, respond to and recover from a crisis.

The archived webcast is accessible at <http://www.ConnectLive.com/events/edschoolsafety>. Software to enable viewing of the webcast is available at no charge and may be downloaded directly from the site.

Developing and implementing comprehensive, multi-hazard emergency management plans is an ongoing process that must be consistently reinforced and strengthened. School and school district crisis response teams must continually work with community partners to develop districtwide and school-based plans that effectively ensure the safety and security of the entire school community, including faculty, staff, students and visitors, as well as the continuity of daily business operations in the face of natural and man-made disasters and other emergencies. In addition, routine testing of the plans' components, which are based on the four phases of emergency management—prevention-mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery—will enhance each component's effectiveness, build broader support for preparedness efforts, and assist with sustaining the plan over time.

Although an emergency management plan may have been well-thought out



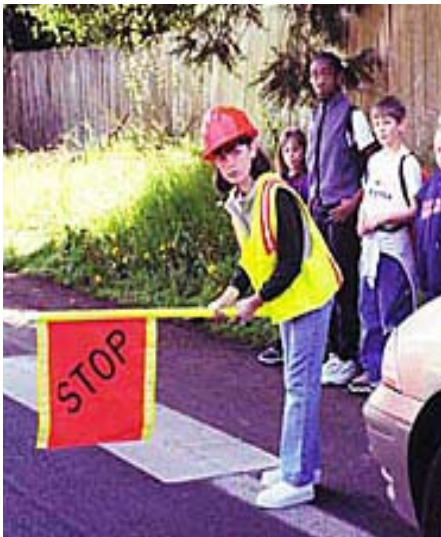
and carefully planned, it needs to be regularly reviewed and updated for a variety of reasons. Modifications based on building depreciation, resource allocation changes, population changes, staff changes, school-based policy changes, policy changes from first responders and the lessons learned from after-action reports can all impact an emergency management plan. Opportunities for reviewing, strengthening and updating emergency management plans can be found in the implementation of the following elements.

The contents of this document are not prescriptive best practices for every school or school district, but rather suggestions to consider in a school or district's emergency management efforts.

Conducting Emergency Exercises

A powerful strategy for assessing a school's level of emergency preparedness is to test its emergency management plan by conducting routine exercises, such as orientation scenarios, seminars, tabletop exercises, drills, functional simulations and full-scale exercises. All exercises should be conducted in close collaboration with community partners (e.g., fire, police, emergency services, and public and mental health personnel). Full-scale exercises provide a realistic environment in which school- and community-based participants may practice their roles and responsibilities, and offer valuable opportunities to:

- Activate the Incident Command System (ICS);
- Activate appropriate response protocols;



- Assess needed resources, including emergency equipment and supplies;
- Assess facilities plans, tools and operations;
- Test communications plans with community partners, school staff, students, the media and parents or guardians;
- Activate the student-parent reunification plan;
- Identify strengths and weaknesses in the current emergency management plan and ensure they are clearly outlined in the after-action reports;
- Modify the plan based on lessons learned; and
- Support the use of the National Incident Management System (NIMS).

Collaborating With Community Partners

School districts should promote ongoing collaboration with community partners and the media to establish and maintain strong relationships before a crisis occurs. To maintain community support, districts may:

- Develop memoranda of understanding with key community partners for services—such as mental health—that may be needed during or following a crisis;



- Ensure first responders have met key school-based emergency management staff, such as members of the district's crisis response team, and are familiar with school facilities, policies and procedures;
- Convene regular districtwide emergency management planning meetings with all community partners;
- Share the components of school and school district emergency management plans as well as relevant information at community fairs, awareness days and PTA meetings;
- Participate in local television and radio programs, or contribute articles on school and school district preparedness efforts to local newspapers; and
- Give advance notice to the public of drills so that the community can prepare for inconveniences such as traffic congestion.



- Seek resources and support from community businesses by working directly with the businesses or the media; and
- Support the annual NIMS compliance activities of local community partners.
- Determine what changes need to be made to ensure the emergency management plan is current and comprehensive.

Although developing an emergency management plan is a complex critical task for crisis response teams, updating and maintaining the plan is equally as critical. Ongoing efforts and activities framed by the four phases of emergency management, coupled with NIMS compliance, will allow schools and school districts to continually strengthen their capacities to effectively maintain the safety and security of the school and local community.

Focusing on Sustainability

The most effective emergency management plans provide direction and support to the entire school community and are continuously reviewed and enhanced through activities that build a school or school district’s capacity to prevent and mitigate emergencies, prepare for incidents and respond to and recover from crises. To increase a school’s capacity to maintain its focus on preparedness, administrators, faculty and staff can:

- Center training sessions around key issues such as emergency management for students and staff with disabilities and creating a school-based ICS;
- Regularly meet with community partners and the entire school community throughout the year;
- Ensure that primary and secondary backup staff are identified for each key position within the ICS;

Conducting Evaluations Consistently

Continuously assessing the procedures in the emergency management plan will add credibility and public trust to the plan, and in those who implement the plan. Crisis response teams should continually evaluate school and school district’s emergency management activities to:

- Document performance and growth in preparedness;
- Demonstrate the usefulness of planned procedures in responding to actual and simulated crisis events;
- Track resources and training over time; and



RESOURCES

Multi-Hazard Emergency Planning for Schools

This short, Web-based course is part of FEMA's Independent Study Program, a component of its Emergency Management Institute. The one-day class specifically addresses hazard assessment, plan development, emergency management operations and the roles and responsibilities of school crisis team members. School-based professionals with emergency management responsibilities, as well as individuals with an interest in school preparedness, are encouraged to take the course.

Additional information is accessible at <http://training.fema.gov/EMIWeb/IS/is362.asp>.

ERCM Webcast

On June 28, 2005, the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools hosted the Emergency Response and Crisis Management webcast. The webcast featured an overview of the four phases of crisis planning (prevention-mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery) and the roles that personnel from school districts, schools and other public agencies play in developing, implementing, evaluating and sustaining emergency management plans.

A copy of the webcast, along with all supporting materials, is now accessible online at <http://www.kidzonline.org/ercm>.

The COPS Collaboration Tool Kit: How to Build, Fix and Sustain Productive Partnerships

The U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) produces a variety of resources that support school and community policing and prevention efforts. As schools and school districts develop, implement and enhance their emergency management plans, they will work closely with community first responders. As a result of recognizing that community partnerships present unique challenges for every community, COPS has created a free tool kit to address those challenges, and provide community leaders with tips, strategies and models for success.

The tool kit is accessible at <http://www.cops.usdoj.gov/Default.asp?Item=344>.



The Emergency Response and Crisis Management (ERCM) Technical Assistance (TA) Center was established in October 2004 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 and crisis response plans by providing technical assistance via trainings, publications and individualized responses to requests. *Helpful Hints* provides a quick overview of school emergency preparedness topics that are frequently the subject of inquiries. For additional information about the National Incident Management System (NIMS) or any other emergency management-related topic, visit the ERCM TA Center at <http://www.ercm.org> or call 1-888-991-3726.

For information about the Emergency Response and Crisis Management grant program, contact Tara Hill (tara.hill@ed.gov), Michelle Sinkgraven (michelle.sinkgraven@ed.gov) or Sara Strizzi (sara.strizzi@ed.gov).

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