

# REMS Express

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## K-12 Six-Step Planning Process

The federal *Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans (School Guide)* describes a practical six-step planning process for developing a high-quality school emergency operations plan (EOP). The resulting plan builds capacity in preparedness and its five mission areas: prevention, mitigation, protection, response, and recovery. To help schools in developing their own school EOP, this *REMS Express* edition offers a practitioner's perspective on the planning process and provides practical illustrations of each of the six steps.

The best way to develop a high-quality EOP is through collaboration. The six planning steps are sequenced to support a cooperative process that invites multiple perspectives for information gathering, prioritizing, goal setting, executing specific activities, and actually writing and evaluating the plan. You can use this process to develop a new plan, conduct a comprehensive review of an existing plan, or strengthen the plans already in place. Following this planning process will help the planning team create and implement a customized school EOP that will meet the unique needs of a whole school community.

### STEP 1: FORM A COLLABORATIVE PLANNING TEAM

The first step to developing a comprehensive and effective school EOP is to form a multidisciplinary team whose members will work through the six-step planning process together. The core planning team should include stakeholders from among

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The REMS TA Center supports schools, school districts, and institutions of higher education in developing and implementing comprehensive emergency operations plans. For additional information about school and higher education emergency management topics, visit the REMS TA Center at <http://rems.ed.gov>.



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# Form A Collaborative Planning Team



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district-level leaders, community partners, and, of course, the school. A collaborative team approach allows multiple professional perspectives to contribute to all aspects of safety and security.

**District-Level Leadership:** Involving senior-level officials in the planning process is fundamental to producing, implementing, and sustaining a high-quality EOP. These leaders can prioritize the allocation of time and personnel needed to engage in an effective planning process. They are able to provide key guidance for creating plans that are aligned with school and district policies, union constraints, and state and local laws, as well as to consider issues of legal liability. As vulnerabilities are identified and strategies proposed for addressing them, leaders can provide important direction on what might be feasible and cost-effective to implement, maintain, and sustain. Similarly, they can look at possible short- and long-range goals for safety enhancements, and understand how those may relate to other school and district priorities. In addition, when those in leadership positions play an active role in the development of the EOP, they demonstrate buy-in and commitment to the plan, which increases the probability that staff will support the plan and that the plan will be assimilated into the culture of the school.

**School Stakeholders:** The core planning team should include representatives from a wide range of school personnel—school administrators, facilities personnel, educators, counselors, nurses, playground supervisors, office staff, students, and families. Such a variety of team members will represent a wide range of voices and interests, such as those with access and functional needs, disabilities, racial minorities, religious groups, and English language learners. When combined, these different perspectives can greatly enhance the team's ability to address the needs of the whole school community as they work through the planning process and

consider responses to a wide range of threats and hazards. For example, facilities personnel have a wealth of knowledge about the building structure, security systems, and utilities; office personnel have a practical understanding of the flow of visitors and volunteers; and, school nurses have a pulse on the medical health needs of students and can provide a critical link with local public health partners. All of these stakeholders provide important insights that will help customize the plan so that it addresses the school's unique circumstances and needs.

**Community Partners:** Other essential members of the planning team include first responders, such as law enforcement and fire personnel, emergency medical services, and school resource officers; local emergency managers; and public and mental health associates. These and other community partners provide critical knowledge and experience specific to various threats and hazards that will help guide the development of an EOP. For example, first responders all function within the Incident Command System, which provides a standardized approach for managing emergencies. Community partners can help schools design their plans so they are aligned with the National Incident Management System (NIMS).

As teams work together through this six-step process, the capabilities, roles, and responsibilities of each member will emerge, facilitating mutual understanding, coordination, and the development of a common framework for managing emergencies. Drawing on the collective wisdom, diverse experiences, and unique perspectives of these stakeholders will enhance the collaborative planning process, and result in strong school-community partnerships and a comprehensive EOP that supports the seamless integration of all responders.

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## STEP 2: UNDERSTAND THE SITUATION

The first order of business for the planning team is to understand the unique situation of the school so that a customized plan can be developed. A comprehensive school emergency planning process utilizes an “all-hazards” approach, which takes into account a wide range of possible threats and hazards to the school, including those that might take place in the community and surrounding. Sometimes schools tend to focus their emergency plans on typical hazards, such as fires and weather-related incidents, or high-profile school emergencies, such as active shooter situations. However, collaborative planning teams need to consider and assess a broad spectrum of hazards and threats — from cybersecurity breaches to flu outbreaks — to determine the level of risk and vulnerability to that particular school, and to plan for adequate protective measures.

The planning team can draw on existing information and conduct assessments to identify the range of threats and hazards that a school might face. School personnel will have knowledge of previous emergencies; community partners will know of threats or hazards prevalent in the community or the region; federal, state, and local historical data can be accessed; and school, city, or county surveys or reports can provide valuable information to help the team determine which threats and hazards need to be addressed. Assessment tools, such as site assessments, culture and climate assessments,

behavioral threat assessments, and capacity assessments, also can produce data that can serve as the basis for the team to identify threats and hazards. Such tools also can help evaluate the unique characteristics of a school including its strengths and vulnerabilities related to various threats and hazards.

Threats and hazards fall into four general categories: natural hazards; technological hazards; biological hazards; and adversarial, incidental, and human-caused threats. The *Guide* features a chart that, while not exhaustive, shows a variety of threats and hazards schools might need to address in their plans. You can access the chart at <http://rems.ed.gov/K12ThreatAndHSAnnex.aspx>.

The planning team should select suitable assessment tools to identify a set of threats and hazard, and then to evaluate the risk posed by them. Evaluating risks entails understanding the probability that the specific threat or hazard will occur; the effects it will likely have, including the severity of the impact; the time the school will have to warn students and staff about the threat or hazard; and how long it may last. Assessments also help illuminate community partners’ response capabilities and philosophies, response times, or communications constraints, and show how associated strengths or weaknesses might affect, and thus shape, some elements of an EOP. For example, if the school is located in an isolated region and response times for first responders are lengthy, procedures may need to be developed to empower schools to take different or additional protective measures than would be necessary for a school with a police force nearby.

Finally, the planning team should use the information it has compiled from the data and assessments to compare and prioritize the risks posed by threats and hazards. This will help

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# Threat or Hazard: Fire

<b>GOAL</b>	<b>BEFORE</b> Prevent a fire from occurring on school grounds	<b>GOAL</b>	<b>DURING</b> Protect students and staff from injury by fire or smoke	<b>GOAL</b>	<b>AFTER</b> Restore a safe and healthy learning environment
	<b>OBJECTIVES</b> Provide fire prevention training to all students and staff  Store combustible materials in fireproof containers  Conduct regular OSHA assessments		<b>OBJECTIVES</b> Evacuate all persons from the building immediately  Account for all persons  Address medical health needs		<b>OBJECTIVES</b> Repair and clean up the physical environment  Address mental health needs  Communicate with stakeholders

the team determine which threats and hazards it will include in the plan. It will also help the team develop appropriate protocols to respond effectively to those threats and hazards. Going through the process of identifying threats and hazards, and evaluating and prioritizing risks, will help the planning team take an all-hazards approach to emergency planning. It also will increase the capacity of the school to provide for the safety of its students, staff, and visitors in a wide range of potential emergency situations.

### STEP 3: DETERMINE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Once the planning team has identified which threats and hazards it will address in its EOP, its next step is to develop goals and objectives to address them. Goals are the team's broad vision of what the school wants to accomplish in response to the threat or hazard; they define a successful outcome. Objectives, by contrast, are specific measurable actions that are necessary to achieve the goals. Planning teams should develop goals and objectives (as many as necessary) that address each threat or hazard in three timeframes: before, during, and after the incident. The box on the right displays an example of some possible goals and objectives for a fire hazard.

After the team has finished compiling the goals and objectives for each of its identified threats and hazards, it will find that certain common, critical functions apply to many types of emergencies. For example, accounting for the whereabouts and well-being of students, communicating with stakeholders, addressing medical needs, and even evacuation protocols are all examples of common critical functions for multiple types of threats or hazards. Other possible functions include lockdown, shelter-in-place, reunification, security, continuity of operations, and recovery. As the planning team assesses the school's needs, it may need to prepare different or additional functional annexes, or topic-based chapters, and identify goals and objectives for those as well.

### STEP 4: PLAN DEVELOPMENT (IDENTIFY COURSES OF ACTION)

Once the planning team has established goals and objectives for all of its identified threats, hazards, and critical functions, it is time to get specific and identify courses of action to accomplish each of the objectives. This is where the team is challenged to address the who, what, when, where, and why for each threat, hazard, and function, and the many different

ways an incident can unfold. The planning team considers the possible impacts using scenarios to create appropriate courses of action--feasible and well-designed response protocols for staff and students to implement during a variety of emergency circumstances. One of the most effective methods to figure out those practical, step-by-step courses of action is to take the planning team through a discussion of a hypothetical emergency scenario. As the scenario is discussed, the planning team will determine the amount of time available to respond, identify key decision points, and develop courses of action for that particular threat, hazard, or function. The graphic above provides an example of a scenario and the corresponding goal, objectives, and potential courses of action.

After developing possible courses of action for the scenario, the planning team will identify the resources necessary to accomplish each course of action as well as the training required to achieve the action effectively and efficiently. These are all important parts of the planning process that help teams develop emergency plans that are realistic, feasible, and adequate to meet the needs of a particular emergency situation and the whole school community.

### STEP 5: PLAN PREPARATION, REVIEW, AND APPROVAL

In step 5, the planning team will take all the work it has done to this point and prepare a draft of the school's EOP. An effective one is presented in a logical way so users can find the information they need easily, is written in plain language that users can understand clearly, and is actionable and simple to follow. A traditional format for a school EOP has three major sections: (1) the Basic Plan, (2) Functional Annexes, and (3) Threat and Hazard Specific Annexes.

The **Basic Plan** section of the school EOP provides an overview of the school's approach to emergency operations. It addresses the overarching activities the school undertakes regardless of function, threat, or hazard. For a detailed description of the contents of this section, visit <http://rems.ed.gov/K12BasicPlan.aspx>.

The **Functional Annexes** section sets forth how the school will manage common, essential functions like evacuation, lockdown, communications, accounting for students, and so forth, before, during, and after an emergency.

The **Threat and Hazard Specific Annexes** section identifies specific protocols schools will follow to address the unique threats and hazards they may face.

The planning team will write the plan, various stakeholders will review it, and revisions will be made. Tools, such as quick reference guides and related documents, will be developed

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# Example of Goals and Objectives for a Fire Hazard

## SCENARIO

Local law enforcement informs school officials that a large capacity tanker truck carrying an unknown substance has over-turned nearby. In order to protect (seal off) students and staff from potentially hazardous materials, they are requesting the school initiate a “shelter-in-place” protocol until the substance can be identified.



## Function: Shelter-in-Place

**GOAL: DURING:** Protect Students and Staff from Exposure to the Contaminant

<b>OBJECTIVE</b>	<p><b>Notify all students and staff to follow shelter-in-place protocol</b></p> <p><b>COURSES OF ACTION</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Make announcement on PA/intercom system</li> <li>Contact classes meeting outside using two-way radio</li> <li>Send runner to gym and music rooms to verify notification</li> <li>Call transportation to divert buses away from the area</li> </ul>	<b>OBJECTIVE</b>	<p><b>Provide immediate medical support before rooms are sealed</b></p> <p><b>COURSES OF ACTION</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Deliver inhalers to designated students</li> <li>Move medically fragile students to health room</li> <li>Discreetly remind teachers of medical protocols</li> </ul>	<b>OBJECTIVE</b>	<p><b>Seal rooms within 3 minutes of notification</b></p> <p><b>COURSES OF ACTION</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Close all windows and doors</li> <li>Seal gaps with wet towels</li> <li>Cover all openings to outdoors with plastic sheeting and tape</li> </ul>	<b>OBJECTIVE</b>	<p><b>Turn off HVAC system within 3 minutes of notification</b></p> <p><b>COURSES OF ACTION</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Shut down master HVAC system for main building</li> <li>Shut down auxiliary HVAC system for gymnasium</li> <li>Close individual unit ventilators in portable classrooms</li> </ul>
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to present and communicate the plan effectively. Once the plan is finalized, it should be submitted to senior-level leaders for approval. At this point, the EOP can be distributed and shared with appropriate stakeholders. The team will need to determine what parts of the plan should be redacted and how this will be accomplished.

## STEP 6: PLAN IMPLEMENTATION AND MAINTENANCE

Now that the major effort to create the school EOP has been accomplished, a number of critical activities that help

to strengthen the effectiveness of the plan must follow. Stakeholders should be trained on the plan so it can be implemented effectively. Everyone involved in the plan — staff members, substitute teachers, students, volunteers, and community partners — needs to know her or his roles and responsibilities before, during, and after an emergency. This can be accomplished by having a meeting to orient stakeholders to the new or revised plan; touring key locations, such as evacuation routes, assembly areas, and utility shut-off locations; distributing plan documents and tools; posting key information throughout the school; and handing out essential resources related to the plan, such as shelter-in-place supplies or two-way radios. Customized plans for individuals who need accommodations to accomplish the emergency protocols also will need to be developed.

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# QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE TO AN EMERGENCY

## LOCKDOWN

1. Lock doors and windows.
2. Turn off lights.
3. Everyone on the floor and quiet.
4. Do not admit anyone.

## EVACUATION

1. Evacuate the building.
2. Be prepared to take alternate route.
3. Gather in assembly areas.
4. Account for all students and staff.

## SHELTER-IN-PLACE

1. Close windows and doors.
2. Seal gaps with wet towels.
3. Turn off HVAC systems.
4. Cover all openings to outdoors with plastic sheeting and tape.

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Training on the threat, hazard, and functional annexes can be done in person and through demonstrations; online training videos or webinars; and drills, tabletop scenarios, and exercises. Setting up a regular schedule of drills and exercises provides stakeholders with consistent practice to increase the effectiveness of plan implementation, which may in turn lessen the impact on life and property in real emergencies. Drills and exercises also help to identify gaps and weaknesses in the plan or deficiencies in training, which is why it is always important to debrief and evaluate after conducting a drill, so corrections can be made. Districts and schools can provide training and

conduct exercises in collaboration with community partners and relevant stakeholders. This can help inform everyone of the details of the plan, increase positive working relationships, and allow for more realistic practice, all of which help to increase effectiveness and provide for more safety in the event of an emergency.

Maintaining a relevant and up-to-date EOP is an ongoing and cyclical process. The EOP should be reviewed and revised regularly to account for lessons learned in real emergencies; new information and insights obtained from community partners; recent changes in policies or laws; and building reconfigurations or technology advances, as new threats and hazards emerge and as ongoing assessments generate new information. The planning team will need to collect out-of-date EOPs and distribute updated versions to all school and community partner stakeholders, and update related publications and social media venues.

## The Outcome: A High-Quality School EOP

A well-executed, collaborative planning process produces important outcomes, including strong relationships and a clear understanding of each other's roles and responsibilities; plan ownership, buy-in, and sustainability; and a customized, high-quality school EOP that serves the safety, security, and wellness needs of the whole school community.

## Where to Find Additional Resources

Additional information on emergency planning guidance for schools, a downloadable copy of the School Guide, fact sheets, EOP development tools, and other resources can be found on the REMS TA Center website at <http://rems.ed.gov>.

Click on the picture to access an at-a-glance version of the *School Guide*, which provides details about the planning process and principles, as well as plan content, functional annexes, and threat- and hazard-specific annexes.

