Lesson Overview

An effective Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) for a school will address all of the common response issues **as well as** particular issues related to specific hazards. Developing that Plan is a systematic process requiring collaboration from multiple community participants.

This lesson presents the steps to follow during the planning process. By the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

- Explain the essential attributes of an effective Emergency Operations Plan.
- Explain how using the Incident Command System can help to provide a coordinated response to an emergency.
- Explain how to identify resources that will be needed in an emergency, and ways to obtain those resources.

Components of an Emergency Operations Plan

In addressing both common response issues and specific hazards, an effective Emergency Operations Plan will be:

- **Comprehensive:** It will include complete response procedures for everyone who has a role in the response.
- **Risk-based:** It will address the actual risks facing the school.
- **All-hazards in approach:** It will apply in any hazardous situation, from lightning strike to terrorist threat.

Planning Steps

This lesson describes the process involved in developing a school Emergency Operations Plan.

- Step 1: Develop planning assumptions.
- Step 2: Specify your concept of operations and emergency procedures.
- Step 3: Determine roles and responsibilities.
- Step 4: Identify needed resources.
- Step 5: Develop the Plan.

Remember, emergency operations planning involves all of the planning activities required to **respond to** and **recover from** an emergency.

Develop Planning Assumptions

Developing assumptions about potential situations that might occur helps the planning team narrow the scope of the school Emergency Operations Plan. These assumptions outline:

- Hazards that the Plan is meant to address.
- Characteristics about the community that could affect response activities.
- Information used in preparing the Emergency Operations Plan that is hypothesis rather than fact.

The hazard analysis conducted early in the process of planning for emergencies by the planning team serves as the source of these assumptions.

Determining the Situation

The types of information that should be addressed in the Plan include the following:

- Hazards to be addressed. Include hazards identified as being high risk (e.g., tornadoes, flooding, fire) or having a high degree of impact (e.g., explosion, terrorist incident).
- Probability of the occurrence of such events.
- The areas of the building or grounds that would most likely be affected (e.g., the vulnerability of the gym roof in high wind).
- The locations of special populations (e.g., students with disabilities, non-English-speaking students).
- Critical resource needs if a high-risk incident occurred.

Importance of Identifying Plan's Assumptions

Listing the assumptions shows the limitations of the Emergency Operations Plan by delineating what was thought to be true when the Plan was developed.

Explicit statements of assumptions allow users of the Plan to foresee the need to deviate from the Plan if certain assumptions prove to be untrue during an actual emergency situation.

Making assumptions is a necessary part of planning. However, distinguishing between fact and assumption is also important. Facts will remain true in all situations. On the other hand, assumptions may prove to be erroneous.

Examples of Assumptions

Assumption: There will be little or no warning before some disasters, such as flash floods and earthquakes.

Assumption: Following a major or catastrophic event, the school will have to rely on its own resources to be self-sustaining for up to 72 hours.

Assumption: There may be a number of injuries of varying degrees of seriousness. However, rapid and appropriate response will reduce the number and severity of injuries.

Specify Your Concept of Operations and Emergency Procedures

Determining how the school will operate in an emergency situation, and how it will work with response organizations, is critical to a smooth emergency response.

The school (or school district's) overall approach to an emergency situation is called its **concept of operations**. The school's concept of operations explains:

- What should happen . . .
- When . . .
- At whose direction.

Identifying How the School Will Operate

The school's concept of operations should include:

- A statement about how and when the Emergency Operations Plan will be implemented.
- Definition of "action levels" and their implementation.
- The general sequence of events before, during, and after the emergency situation.
- Who will coordinate directly with local and State responders, and how the coordination will take place.

Detailed Emergency Actions

After developing your overall concept of operations, you should then specify how emergency actions would be implemented, including:

- What announcement is made.
- Description of the action.
- When the action is used.

Examples of emergency actions include evacuations, take cover, or secure (lock down) buildings.

Detailed Emergency Procedures

For each potential hazard or incident identified in your hazard analysis, you should develop a list of detailed steps to be followed.

Examples of emergency situations requiring schools to establish procedures range from bomb threats, chemical accidents, fires, and floods to student disorder and irrational behavior.

This section of your Plan should be very comprehensive.

Determine Roles and Responsibilities

All schools have an organizational system in place that includes:

- A person in charge.
- Administrative staff.
- Faculty.
- Maintenance personnel.

However, this organization that works well for day-to-day activities may not work as well in an emergency. There is another way to organize resources in an emergency, using a nationally accepted standard for disaster response.

Incident Command System (ICS)

Professional responders have developed a method for managing emergencies efficiently. That method—the Incident Command System, or ICS—has proven successful both in small emergencies and in catastrophic disasters.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and State emergency management agencies have adopted ICS as their management system, though some States use different terminology.

Using ICS

Using the Incident Command System helps to ensure:

- Life safety.
- Property protection.
- Effective resource management.

Adopting ICS will help school personnel work with emergency responders to provide a coordinated response. ICS is the common link between the school and all others who are involved with (or have an interest in) the emergency.

ICS Principle: Response Requires Certain Functions

ICS is based on certain principles that have proven successful in managing emergency situations. A fundamental principle is that emergencies require certain tasks or functions to be performed.

For example, every emergency will require such functions as student care, site or facility security, and communications.

These functions should be identified during the development of the school's concept of operations and, if possible, personnel should be matched to functions at that time.

ICS Principle: One Person Is in Charge

Every incident needs one person in charge.

- That person, called the **Incident Commander**, may be the superintendent or the building principal.
- The person in charge must be identified before and during an emergency.
- All faculty and staff must know who the person in charge is, before and during an emergency.

It is helpful if the Incident Commander and other key personnel wear vests or use other means of ready identification during drills and actual emergencies.

ICS Principle: Limit the Span of Control

Experience has shown that an effective span of control in an emergency is five to seven people.

Fewer than three people generally leads to inefficient operations. Greater than seven is generally too much for one individual to manage during an emergency.

ICS Principle: Report to One Person Only

No person should report to more than one individual. A clear chain of command eliminates confusion during the stress of an emergency.

ICS Principle: Common Terminology Is Key

Common terminology means that everyone:

- Uses the same words to refer to the same situation.
- Knows the terminology before an emergency arises.

To ensure that school personnel and response personnel "speak the same language":

- Avoid using "codes" unless absolutely necessary.
- When codes are necessary, ensure that school and response personnel know them in advance.
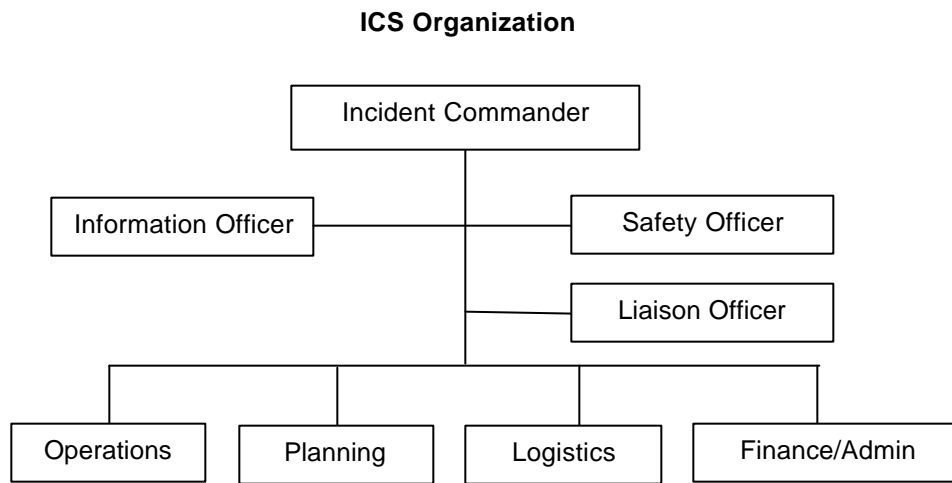

Some Key ICS Terminology

All school and response personnel must know the following terms prior to any emergency:

- **Incident Command:** The organizational structure that the school will use during an emergency.

- **Command Post:** The area from which the command function will operate during an emergency.

The ICS Organization

The diagram below shows the structure of the Incident Command System organization.

ICS Organization

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                        ┌─────────────────────┐
                        │ Incident Commander  │
                        └─────────────────────┘
                                  │
  ┌─────────────────────┐        │        ┌─────────────────────┐
  │ Information Officer  │────────┼────────│   Safety Officer    │
  └─────────────────────┘        │        └─────────────────────┘
                                  │        ┌─────────────────────┐
                                  │────────│   Liaison Officer   │
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        ┌──────────┬──────────────┼──────────────┬──────────────┐
  ┌───────────┐ ┌───────────┐ ┌───────────┐ ┌───────────────┐
  │ Operations│ │ Planning  │ │ Logistics │ │ Finance/Admin │
  └───────────┘ └───────────┘ └───────────┘ └───────────────┘
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Incident Commander's Responsibilities

In an emergency, the Incident Commander constantly:

- Assesses the situation.
- Establishes objectives.
- Tracks resource needs: what resources are available, have been assigned, and are needed.
- Develops a strategy or plan for handling the emergency, monitors it in process, and adjusts the plan as needed.
- Ensures proper documentation.
- Appoints additional staff as necessary.

Safety Officer's Responsibilities

The Safety Officer:

- Ensures that the safety of students, staff, and others on campus is the highest priority.

- Has the authority to halt any response activities that create an unsafe situation or put students, faculty, staff, or others at risk.

Public Information Officer's Responsibilities

The Public Information Officer (PIO):

- Acts as a liaison with the public, including the media.

- Must be well informed about the situation at all times.

- Should be the only one who talks with the media. All other staff members should refer media questions to the PIO.

Primary ICS Functions

In addition to the Incident Command function, there are four other ICS functions that report directly to the Incident Commander:

Section	Description
Operations Section	Handles all emergency response jobs, including taking care of students. Most adult responders will be assigned jobs in the Operations Section.
Planning Section	Tracks resources, assesses the changing situation, documents the response, and maintains the site map at the Command Post.
Logistics Section	Manages and distributes supplies, personnel, and equipment. Deploys unassigned people.
Finance/ Administration Section	Buys materials. Keeps financial records of expenditures and employee hours. (<u>Note</u>: A school Plan's ICS may not include a Finance/ Administration Section. This function may be performed at the school district level. In such circumstances, the Incident Commander must ensure that proper documentation is maintained.)

How ICS Functions in School Systems

The Incident Commander must be someone who is on the scene at the emergency site. The Incident Commander operates from the Command Post, which is located on site but away from the risk of damage from the incident.

The school principal may be the Incident Commander, but not necessarily. ICS positions should be assigned based on who is best qualified for each position, not according to seniority or positional authority in day-to-day work.
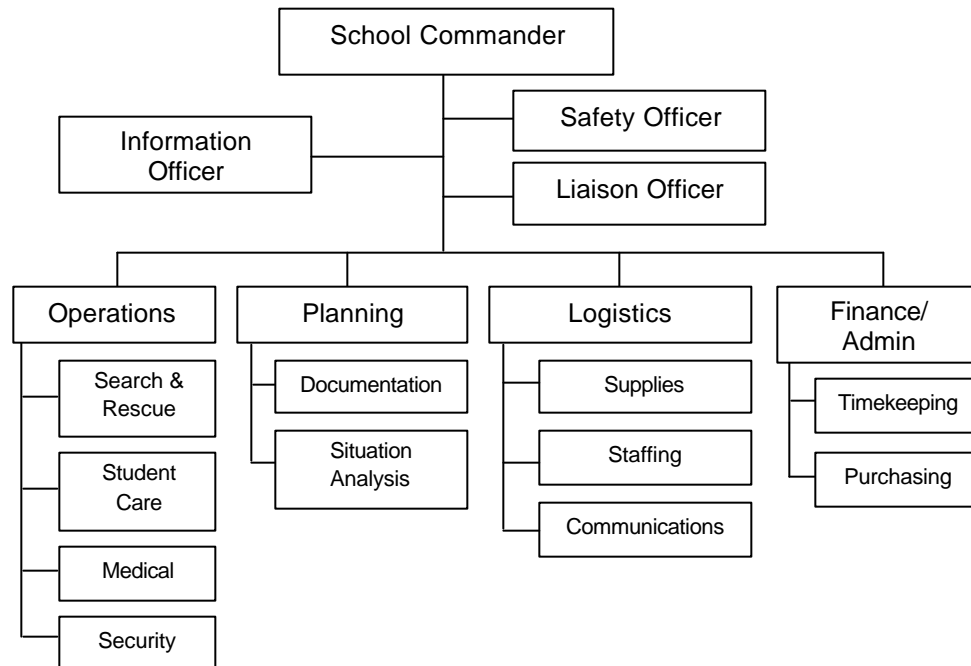
During an emergency, responsibilities and lines of authority will change from day-to-day authorities. School personnel must be aware and accepting of these changes.

Typical ICS Structure at a School

This diagram illustrates a typical ICS configuration at a school. Each key person shown should:

- Have a back-up assigned in case the primary person is unavailable or injured.
- Be trained to perform the duties required of the position.

School ICS Structure

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                          │  School Commander   │
                          └─────────────────────┘
                                    │
              ┌─────────────────┐   │   ┌─────────────────────┐
              │   Information   │───┼───│   Safety Officer    │
              │     Officer     │   │   └─────────────────────┘
              └─────────────────┘   │   ┌─────────────────────┐
                                    │───│   Liaison Officer   │
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  ┌──────────┐  ┌──────────┐   ┌──────────┐      ┌──────────┐
  │Operations│  │ Planning │   │ Logistics│      │ Finance/ │
  └──────────┘  └──────────┘   └──────────┘      │  Admin   │
       │             │              │            └──────────┘
  ┌─────────┐   ┌─────────────┐ ┌─────────┐          │
  │Search & │   │Documentation│ │ Supplies│     ┌────────────┐
  │ Rescue  │   └─────────────┘ └─────────┘     │Timekeeping │
  └─────────┘   ┌─────────────┐ ┌─────────┐     └────────────┘
  ┌─────────┐   │  Situation  │ │ Staffing│     ┌────────────┐
  │ Student │   │  Analysis   │ └─────────┘     │ Purchasing │
  │  Care   │   └─────────────┘ ┌──────────────┐└────────────┘
  └─────────┘                   │Communications│
  ┌─────────┐                   └──────────────┘
  │ Medical │
  └─────────┘
  ┌─────────┐
  │ Security│
  └─────────┘
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Tailoring ICS for Various Incidents

The ICS organization can expand and contract to meet the needs of the incident.

- **ICS Structure for a Small Playground Incident:** For a playground incident involving one student being injured, there probably would not be any need to assign section chiefs for Logistics, Planning, or Finance/Administration. The principal would act as the Incident Commander as well as the Operations Chief, and would coordinate with Emergency Medical Services personnel to treat the student's injuries.

- **ICS Structure for a Fire Incident:** In the event of a fire at a school, the Incident Commander would be from the fire department, and the school representative would be part of the Operations Section. The police department would also have an ICS representative in a fire situation. While the Incident Commander is not a school employee, the school district would not be left out of the decision-making loop. The Logistics, Planning, and Finance/Administration Section Chiefs would be assigned, if needed.

Using a Unified Command

When first responders arrive, the incident command may transition to a **unified command**. Unified command means that designated individuals from response agencies work jointly with the school commander to carry out the response.

In a unified command, school personnel retain responsibility for student and staff safety.

Covering All ICS Bases in the School Plan

A school's Emergency Operations Plan should include procedures for each of the functional ICS areas, as well as for others that may be pertinent to the school. In most emergencies, many of the ICS positions will not need to be filled.

If the school Plan calls for assigning classroom teachers to ICS positions, some classrooms will be uncovered. Having a buddy system in place:

- Ensures all students are supervised properly if a teacher needs to perform his or her ICS function.
- Provides for coverage of all students in the event that some teachers become casualties or are injured in the event.

Setting Up a Buddy System

After developing a buddy list pairing each individual teacher with another teacher to ensure proper coverage of students in an emergency situation, school administrators need to ensure that:

- Each teacher has copies of both class rosters.
- Both classes evacuate to the same area or go to the same safe area of the school.

An effective buddy system is based on classroom proximity. Class rosters should be kept in a readily accessible location with other emergency supplies (e.g., whistle, pens, signs, flashlight, etc.).

Possible Assignments in a Disaster

In a severe emergency or disaster, the following emergency team assignments may need to be established:

- Communications (Logistics)
- Food, Water, and Supply Management (Logistics)
- Medical/First Aid (Operations)
- Maintenance/Fire (Operations)
- Light Search and Rescue (Operations)
- Student Care and Unification (Operations)
- Student Release (Operations)
- Crisis Response (Operations)

Critical Function: Parental Notification

Schools should send home information about the school's emergency procedures at the beginning of the school year and again before typical natural disasters might occur (e.g., winter storms, tornadoes, hurricanes).

Informing parents of emergency procedures:

- Inspires confidence in the school's preparedness measures.

- Makes operations in an actual emergency run more smoothly.

- Helps the school meet its legal obligation to account for and protect the children.

Critical Function: Student Care and Reunification

Student care in an emergency is one of the most important tasks faced by schools. It includes student accounting, protection from weather, providing for sanitation needs, and providing for food and water. Classroom teachers will handle much of student care. All tasks—and the assignments of personnel to handle those tasks—must be included in the Emergency Operations Plan.

Reunification refers to getting students reunited with their parents or guardians in an efficient and orderly manner. Reunification can be an enormous challenge and takes a lot of planning.

Critical Function: Student Release

In an emergency situation, schools must establish a safe area for parents to go to pick up their children. This area must be away from both the damage and the student assembly area.

In a typical student release procedure, parents would report to the assigned area and give their child's name to the person in charge. A runner would get the child from the student assembly area and accompany the student back to the pick-up area.

Parents would then sign a form to indicate that they had picked up their child, and someone at the pick-up area would note the date and time of the pick-up on the form.

Identify Needed Resources

In planning for emergencies, it is wise for school personnel to use 72 hours as a guide in determining resource needs. Depending on the situation, they may have to rely on the school's internal resources for that long.

Resources to have on hand would include such things as:

- Tools
- Medical supplies
- Food and blankets

How To Identify Resource Needs

Answering the following questions will help determine the types of supplies to have on hand for emergency preparedness:

- What types of damage might occur in specific large disasters? Damage might include building collapse; broken windows; disruptions to gas/oil, electric, sewer, and water supplies/services; and severe injuries.

- What problems might occur if utilities and/or water service were affected in an emergency?

- What tools and equipment might be needed for emergency response activities, given the possible damage and potential problems identified?

Other Important Resources

In addition to search and rescue equipment and food and warmth supplies, teachers would also need certain resources to help account for and control students.

Such resources might include emergency "go kits" with class rosters, pencils, a whistle, and a flashlight.

Potential Sources of Various Resources

Schools may be able to secure the supplies and equipment needed from the following sources:

Tools	Local parks and recreation, transportation, and/or public works departments
Medical supplies	Local physicians, walk-in clinics, and/or hospitals
Food and blankets	American Red Cross, local hotel/motel(s) and restaurants

It is essential to have critical supplies and equipment on hand and easily accessed at school. In addition, everyone must know where the supplies are kept. You may want to include a list of critical supplies in your Plan.

Long-Term Recovery Resources: Planning for Psychological Recovery

Part of the Emergency Operations Plan is planning for the psychological after-effects of an emergency, which can last longer than the physical effects.

A crisis response team is a long-term recovery resource that should not be overlooked.

Members of this team should include school counselors and other who are trained, respected, and sensitive to the needs of students, parents, and all other school personnel.

Mental Health Referrals

The school psychological response team would be responsible for helping both students and staff recover emotionally from the traumatic event.

Part of the team's function would be to ensure that all staff members learn warning signs to watch for that would indicate children or adults are experiencing ongoing problems after the trauma.

Making a mental health referral may be necessary to help some individuals recover after an emergency. Early intervention with the right kind of support speeds the return to normalcy and avoids later problems.

Develop the Plan

Some words of advice from Kitsap County . . .

"At first, writing a Plan may seem like an overwhelming job. However, if taken one step at a time and with a little help, the planning process becomes a manageable project with accomplishable tasks and milestones. Utilizing a committee approach is an extremely positive way to involve all school staff and residents and give them an opportunity to learn what to expect from each other and from community emergency response assistance. This approach helps internalize the Plan while avoiding the pitfall of simply complying with the requirements for a document."

Putting It All Together

Developing the Plan is simply bringing together all of the decisions and procedures established into a well-organized, easy-to-read document.

After the Plan is written it should then be distributed to school personnel and to the community agencies that would be involved in emergency response at the school.

Items to include with the Plan include maps of the school facility and grounds, telephone trees for emergency communication, and emergency points of contact for the response team.

Forms, Checklists, and Job Aids

After your Plan is completed, then you may want to develop forms, checklists, and job aids to help ensure its smooth implementation.

Listed below are examples of the types of forms you may want to create:

- Bomb Threat Report
- Emergency Drill Record
- Emergency Status Report
- Injury and Missing Persons Report
- Student Release Log and Permission Slip
- Communication Log

Using the School Emergency Operations Plan

Beyond simple distribution, however, the Plan must serve as the basis for:

- Training staff.

- Exercising and testing the Plan.

- Reviewing and revising the school's emergency response activities, organization, and assignments as needed, and at least annually.

In an ideal world, schools would not have to deal with serious emergencies or disasters, but in this real world, it is wise to try to prepare for worst-case scenarios. The true test of an Emergency Operations Plan is how well it works in guiding a school's response to emergencies—and in minimizing the potential consequences of such events.

Web Resources

- Emergency Preparedness and Support Fairfax County Public Schools Fairfax, VA http://www.fcps.edu/DOC/support

- Model School Plan and Planning Guide Washington State Emergency Management Division in Partnership with Kitsap County Emergency Management http://www.wa.gov/ago/ourschool/6_hazard/index.htm

- Marin County Schools: Emergency Preparedness Services http://mcoeweb.marin.k12.ca.us/emerprep/

- The Snohomish County Department of Emergency Management: Model School Plan http://www.snodem.org/factsheets/schoolmodel.pdf

Summary

This lesson presented the following planning steps:

- Step 1: Develop planning assumptions.
- Step 2: Specify your concept of operations and emergency procedures.
- Step 3: Determine roles and responsibilities.
- Step 4: Identify needed resources.
- Step 5: Develop the Plan.