

EMERGENCY PLANNING FOR AMERICA'S SCHOOLS

The U.S. Department of Education is working with school safety experts from around the United States to make available to schools a model emergency response and crisis management plan. The model will be available in March 2003, but excerpts are available below. For more information, visit www.ed.gov/emergencyplan/.

Emergency Plans

If you don't have a school crisis plan in partnership with public safety agencies, including law enforcement and fire, health, mental health and local emergency preparedness agencies, develop one. Ensure that it addresses traditional crises and emergencies such as fires, school shootings and accidents, as well as biological, radiological, chemical and other terrorist activities.

If you do have a crisis plan, review it. Ensure that it addresses issues related to terrorism, such as biological, radiological and chemical attacks.

Train, practice and drill. Documents on a shelf don't work in a crisis.

Ensure that your school district crisis plan addresses the unique circumstances and needs of individual schools. Districts are encouraged to develop a separate plan for each school building. Each school crisis plan should address four major areas—prevention/mitigation; preparedness; response and recovery.

Actions that schools should take under each of these areas include:

Prevention/Mitigation:

- Conduct an assessment of each school building. Identify those factors that put the building, students and staff at greater risk, such as proximity to rail tracks that regularly transport hazardous materials or facilities that produce highly toxic material or propane gas tanks, and develop a plan for reducing the risk. This can include plans to evacuate students away from these areas in times of crisis and to reposition propane tanks or other hazardous materials away from school buildings.
- Work with businesses and factories in close proximity to the school to ensure that the school's crisis plan is coordinated with their crisis plans.
- Ensure a process is in place for controlling access and egress to the school. Require all persons who do not have authority to be in the school to sign in.
- Review traffic patterns, and where possible, keep cars, buses, and trucks away from school buildings.
- Review landscaping, and ensure buildings are not obscured by overgrowth of bushes or shrubs where contraband can be placed or persons can hide.

Preparedness:

- Have site plans for each school facility readily available and ensure they are shared with first responders and agencies responsible for emergency preparedness.
- Ensure there are multiple evacuation routes and rallying points. Your first or second evacuation site options may be blocked or unavailable at the time of the crisis.
- Practice responding to crisis on a regular basis.
- Ensure a process is established for communicating during a crisis.
- Inspect equipment to ensure it operates during crisis situations.
- Have a plan for discharging students. Remember that during a crisis many parents and guardians may not be able to get to the school to pick up their child. Make sure every student has a secondary contact person and contact information readily available.
- Have a plan for communicating information to parents and for quelling rumors. Cultivate relationships with the media ahead of time, and identify a public information officer to communicate with the media and the community during a crisis.
- Work with law enforcement officials and emergency preparedness agencies on a strategy for sharing key parts of the school crisis plans.

Response:

- Develop a command structure for responding to a crisis. The roles and responsibilities for educators, law enforcement and fire officials, and other first responders in responding to different types of crisis need to be developed, reviewed and approved.

Recovery:

- Return to the business of teaching and learning as soon as possible.
- Identify and approve a team of credentialed mental health workers to provide mental health services to faculty and students after a crisis. Understand that recovery takes place over time and that the services of this team may be needed over an extended time period.
- Ensure the team is adequately trained.
- The plan needs to include notification of parents on actions that the school intends to take to help students recover from the crisis.

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