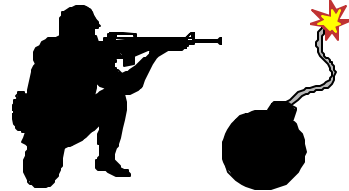
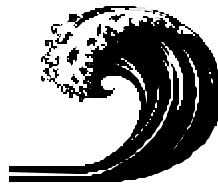


# Creating A Comprehensive Emergency Procedures Manual For Overseas Schools



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Overseas Schools Advisory Council  
Department of State  
Washington, D.C. 20520  
1998

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<b>Director</b>	<b>Dr. Keith D. Miller</b> (202) 261-8200 E-mail: MillerKD2@state.gov
<b>East Asia and Canada</b>	<b>Dr. Beatrice Cameron</b> (202) 261-8211 E-mail: CameronBH2@state.gov
<b>Africa</b>	<b>Dr. Joseph P. Carney</b> (202) 261-8216 E-mail: CarneyJP2@state.gov
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A/OPR/OS Room H328, SA-1  
Department of State  
Washington, DC 20522-0132  
Telephone: (202) 261-8200  
Fax: (202) 261-8224  
E-mail: OverseasSchools@state.gov  
Internet: [www.state.gov/m/a/os](http://www.state.gov/m/a/os)  
Intranet: <http://aopros.a.state.gov/>

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“Creating a Comprehensive Emergency Procedures Manual for Overseas Schools” was a collaborative project from the onset. The team that wrote the manual consisted of the following individuals:

Pat Andjelkovic, International School of Belgrade  
David M. Cobb, Executive Director, CEESA  
Kathy Kerrigan, International School of Prague  
Indre Melynys, American International School of Vilnius  
Darby Rosengren, International School of Helsinki

The above team worked as a unit; they shared suggestions, ideas, and strategies to make this manual as useful as possible to the entire community of international schools.

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Finally, many thanks go to all the schools who took part in the “Emergency Procedures Survey.” These schools generously sent their emergency procedures manuals and other useful information in addition to their insightful answers to the survey. This project could not have been done without their help. (Please refer to the General Appendix, “Respondents to CEESA Survey,” for a complete listing of those schools who participated in the survey.)

For further information about this manual, please e-mail the CEESA office at <[office@ceesa.org](mailto:office@ceesa.org)>. For further information about OSAC, please write to the following address:

Office of Overseas Schools Advisory Council  
Room H328, SA - 1  
U.S. Department of State  
Washington, D.C. 20522-0132  
Tel: (202) 261-8223

## **Introduction**

You do not have to live on the fault line, in the volcano's shadow, by the hurricane belt, or where the "natives are restless" to consider emergency situations in your school. Unfortunately, sooner or later, everyone experiences a death in the community, frozen pipes, or some kind of natural disaster that necessitates serious and timely action—action that may even result in the closing of the school.

The purpose of this manual is to provide the international schools with thinking points in their development of a site-specific emergency manual. This manual breaks the process down into four chapters: Communication; Emergency Preparation, Procedures, and Drills; School Closure; and Psychological Readiness. Each chapter, if fully explored, could be a book. The intention of this manual is to get to the heart of the problem and start you thinking in the right direction.

A worldwide survey was conducted (please refer to the General Appendix) to find out what international schools thought was important as concerns emergency procedures and to solicit examples of existing emergency manuals. Much of this handbook was based on the information presented in these manuals.

The ideas and topics in this manual are generic. They were culled from various sources to give as comprehensive a presentation as possible. Each chapter begins with a checklist covering its contents. This was done to give you a shorthand way to evaluate what needs more attention in your school. You will, no doubt, find topics in this manual that are not appropriate for your school. Pick and choose the parts you need.

You will notice a certain amount of redundancy across the chapters. It was felt that these redundancies should be left in, where appropriate, so that each chapter can be used as a discrete unit.

Take the time now to assess the 'emergency potentials' in your school and plan ahead to ensure the safety and well-being of everyone in your school.

## **Table of Contents**

Chapter I: Communication

Chapter II: Emergency Preparation, Procedures, and Drills

Chapter III: School Closure

Chapter IV: Psychological Readiness

General Appendix

# Chapter I – Communication

Does your school have the following in place?

- Emergency team
- Established channels of communication for an emergency
- Telephone tree
- School directory
- Community directory
- Maps of the school grounds
- Routes of egress during an emergency
- Safe haven locations
- Basic first aid instructions
- Information on the host country's culture, society, and politics
- Emergency communications equipment
- General safety rules
- Parent Notification Form



*"We decided to cut our winter vacation short and return to Yanbu, Saudi Arabia, a week early. I called the school and asked for a driver to pick us up at the airport the following afternoon.*

*'Anything new?' I asked the secretary.*

*'No, boring as usual,' was her reply.*

*On the trip in from the airport the next day, to make small talk with the driver, I asked, 'What's new and exciting?'*

*To my surprise he said he thought there may have been a fire at my small satellite campus the previous night.*

*'How bad was the small fire?' I asked, thinking that I might have to paint the building if there was too strong a smell of smoke in the halls.*

*'I think there was smoke,' was Khalil's response.*

*'Let's swing by the school on the way home,' I said, deciding I had better find out the worst sooner than later.*

*The U-shaped prefab school was nestled in a high-walled campus with a large gate leading to the building entrance. When we arrived at the open gates, I realized that there indeed had been a fire. All I could see was the prefab's metal frame and the far wall. The 'small' fire had burned the entire school to the ground. I had one week of vacation to create a new home for 120 students and teachers, find materials, start new records, and try to figure out what to do about the desk full of Christmas mail now gone."*

*Mr. David Cobb  
Executive Director  
CEESA*

## **Chapter One - Communication**

Clear communication links that follow rehearsed guidelines before, during, and after a crisis serve to calm fears, allay rumors, and strengthen the community. The grids that follow outline tasks for every member of the school community before, during, and after an emergency. The narrative that follows the grids discusses the various communication tasks in detail, taking into consideration the different sizes and locations of international schools.

This chapter has two goals: to present the specific responsibilities of all involved in the school community in preparing for and getting through an emergency, and to provide generic letters, forms, and other literature for ensuring that information is updated and available.

<i>Responsibilities</i>	<i>BEFORE an emergency</i>	<i>DURING an emergency</i>	<i>AFTER an emergency</i>
<b><u>EMERGENCY TEAM</u></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• formalize composition each year</li> <li>• meet regularly to review roles</li> <li>• designate one spokesperson to communicate with media and others in community during emergency</li> <li>• ascertain that emergency manual is current</li> <li>• do inventory of school media</li> <li>• meet with staff to discuss emergency procedures</li> <li>• meet with community to share relevant aspects of emergency procedures</li> <li>• ascertain that student family contact information is current</li> <li>• ascertain that school telephone tree is current</li> <li>• oversee distribution of other relevant information</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• verify the existence of the emergency</li> <li>• assume primary responsibility for initiating communication (one spokesperson only)</li> <li>• assume/delegate all ongoing communication duties</li> <li>• be alert for rumors/ unsubstantiated information in the community</li> <li>• coach and support teachers in their role</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• meet to ascertain what worked and what didn't</li> <li>• solicit feedback from teachers, students, parents, community (meetings, surveys)</li> <li>• lead efforts to debrief</li> <li>• lead follow-up work</li> <li>• incorporate any appropriate changes into school emergency manual</li> <li>• make written report to include in manual for future reference</li> </ul>

<i>Responsibilities</i>	<i>BEFORE an emergency</i>	<i>DURING an emergency</i>	<i>AFTER an emergency</i>
<u><b>TEACHERS/ STAFF</b></u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• meet with emergency team to go over emergency manual at beginning of school year</li> <li>• review Teacher Handbook</li> <li>• participate in orientation for new teachers</li> <li>• keep up-to-date on political situation in country and on school's past emergency history</li> <li>• provide students with opportunity to practice drills</li> <li>• review emergency procedures with students</li> <li>• keep current class list and contact numbers readily available</li> <li>• have activities/games ready in the event of confinement</li> <li>• during school-sponsored trip, make sure that parents of participating children have received proper contact numbers</li> <li>• during school-sponsored trip, keep in contact with the school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• communicate to students, giving clear, calm directives and appropriate information</li> <li>• follow signals or other communications as received</li> <li>• keep order</li> <li>• be alert for rumors/ unsubstantiated information in community</li> <li>• during school-sponsored trip, keep in constant contact with the school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• debrief with administration</li> <li>• work with colleagues and administration to determine what worked and what didn't</li> <li>• debrief and work with students</li> <li>• follow up with students</li> <li>• watch for counseling needs among students and colleagues</li> <li>• follow up with parent-teacher conferences as necessary</li> </ul>

<i>Responsibilities</i>	<i>BEFORE an emergency</i>	<i>DURING an emergency</i>	<i>AFTER an emergency</i>
<b><u>PARENTS</u></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ensure that school has all necessary contact information, medical history, etc.</li> <li>• participate in Open House meeting</li> <li>• review and reinforce emergency procedures with children</li> <li>• review and reinforce embassy/ company emergency policy procedures with children</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ensure that accurate information is received via school switch-board, e-mail, web page, bulletins home, telephone tree, radio, TV, cable</li> <li>• be alert for and report rumors/ unsubstantiated information in community</li> <li>• follow instructions as given by designated spokesperson</li> <li>• ensure that family emergency has been communicated to proper authorities at school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• debrief experience at appropriate Open House meeting/ conference with representatives of the emergency team, school administration, and teachers/staff</li> <li>• respond to school survey on what worked and what didn't</li> <li>• watch for counseling needs among children</li> </ul>

<i>Responsibilities</i>	<i>BEFORE an emergency</i>	<i>DURING an emergency</i>	<i>AFTER an emergency</i>
<b><u>STUDENTS</u></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• become familiar with emergency procedures as part of the curriculum</li> <li>• participate in drills and exercises to reinforce procedures</li> <li>• work with family members to become familiar with embassy/ company emergency procedures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• cooperate and follow instructions given by teacher</li> <li>• dispel rumor</li> <li>• cooperate and share with peers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• provide teachers with feedback on what worked and what didn't</li> <li>• be alert to any unusual behavior of peers that might need attention from a teacher or counselor</li> <li>• talk through experience in class with peers and teachers</li> </ul>

<i>Responsibilities</i>	<i>BEFORE an emergency</i>	<i>DURING an emergency</i>	<i>AFTER an emergency</i>
<b><u>OTHERS IN THE COMMUNITY</u></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• participate in Open House meeting for community</li> <li>• get to know/ recognize school-appointed spokesperson</li> <li>• become familiar with school emergency manual</li> <li>• keep informed about the local situation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• be alert for information coming from school</li> <li>• follow instructions from school spokesperson</li> <li>• dispel rumor</li> <li>• use common sense</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• work with spokesperson to normalize relationship with school</li> <li>• give feedback to spokesperson on parts of the emergency plan that worked, and those that didn't</li> </ul>

In addition to setting out guidelines and procedures for its staff during a crisis, the international school must inform its client community of parents, friends of the school, local authorities, organizations, and businesses before and after a crisis occurs, and how it plans to deal with it. The well-prepared school has clear communications objectives for before, during, and after an emergency that have been routinely and clearly communicated to the school community.

Communication should begin each year with a packet of information on emergency procedures that is given to every new family as part of the general school handout (*see Appendix #1 of this chapter*). Recipients should be able to quickly grasp the types of crises that could confront the school community (anecdotes from other international schools or previous incidents from that school could be helpful here, if presented in a non-inflammatory, objective way); the chain of command within the school community; and responsibilities of the school staff during a crisis.

It is imperative that the school office have full, updated information on every school family (*see suggested form: Appendix #2 of this chapter*). An abbreviated version of procedures, updated school contact numbers (perhaps including local emergency numbers), and a request for updated family contact numbers should be given to every school family, via the school newsletter or a special mailing home, every year. The Open House meeting is a good forum to solicit information and to make a presentation on emergency procedures. Orientation meetings for new families are also ideal opportunities for getting important information and presenting emergency procedures.

## **Handbooks**

School handbooks should be written in a clear and concise manner, and should cover every possible emergency situation. A school may choose to incorporate their literature on emergency procedures into one general handbook on the school, or they may prefer to have a separate handbook on emergency procedures. Whatever the case, information on the school's emergency procedures should be distributed to everyone associated with the school; it should also be easily accessible for reference..

The sections below refer to what should be included in the emergency procedures section of each respective handbook.

Staff Handbook. This handbook should include the following:

- Emergency Team: list of emergency team members; the responsibilities of each member; the members' telephone numbers and addresses
- Telephone tree
- School directory (should include the addresses and phone numbers of local embassies, hospitals, and other important institutions)
- Emergency procedures: each type of emergency procedure should be clearly outlined for easy reference
- Staff members' responsibilities during emergencies: who is responsible for whom and what during each type of emergency
- Maps of the school grounds and routes of egress during an emergency
- Safe haven locations (addresses, telephone numbers, maps)
- Basic first aid instructions
- Additional information specific to the country/culture in which the school is located (for example, how to deal with an earthquake at home; how to dress and behave in Muslim countries; how to deal with food poisoning; names of medicines and equipment in the host country's language; how to deal with evacuation from the host country; etc.)
- Safety rules and regulations, with reference to student behavior, parents' responsibilities, staff responsibilities, general school policy
- Staff members' contractual rights and benefits during a major emergency (for example, in the case of a force majeure closing)

Parent Handbook. This handbook should include the following:

- Emergency Team: list of emergency team members; the members' telephone numbers and addresses
- Telephone tree



- School directory (should include the addresses and phone numbers of local embassies, hospitals, and other important institutions)
- Overview of how the school intends to deal with emergency situations
- Maps of the school grounds and routes of egress during an emergency
- Safe haven locations (addresses, telephone numbers, maps)
- Additional information specific to the country/culture in which the school is located (for example, how to deal with an earthquake at home; how to dress and behave in Muslim countries; how to deal with food poisoning; names of medicines and equipment in the host country's language; how to deal with evacuation from the host country; etc.)
- Safety rules and regulations, with reference to student behavior, parents' responsibilities, staff responsibilities, general school policy

Student Handbook. This handbook should include the following (in language appropriate for the grade level):

- Explanations about different types of emergencies: why they occur, what happens during an emergency situation, what can be expected afterwards
- Emergency procedures: these should be clearly outlined with an emphasis on proper student behavior and student responsibilities during each type of emergency situation
- Additional information specific to the country/culture in which the school is located. This should include an overview of the host country's culture and the proper behavior expected. If appropriate, this section should also include information on natural disasters common to the area, civil disturbance, etc.

Note: The Student Handbook can be incorporated into the Parent Handbook. Parents should be encouraged to discuss these issues with their children at home. For younger students in elementary school and kindergarten, a coloring book/picture book on basic emergency procedures should be provided.

## **Before An Emergency: Responsibilities of the Emergency Team**

At the core of a school's emergency procedures is the emergency team. The composition of the emergency team will vary from school to school, but as a rule, the emergency team should consist of the following school professionals:

- Head/Superintendent/Director
- Principal(s)
- Business Manager
- Administrative Officer or Office Manager
- Guidance Counselor
- Health Care Professional
- Director of Transportation
- Director of General School Services

The team should meet before the start of the school year to review procedures from the previous year and to prepare information which will go home to families during the first weeks of the new school year. (During the absence of any member of the team, a back-up member, fully versed in the school's emergency procedures, should be designated.)

The Emergency Team is responsible for maintaining contact and discussing the local situation with respect to potential crises with some or all of the following individuals:

- Local police, security, health authorities (where possible)
- GSO or RSO officer of the U.S. Embassy
- Other security or administrative officers at cooperating embassies
- Security officers and/or health care professionals at multinational companies with school interests

Note: certain emergencies may require the presence of professionals experienced in crisis intervention (e.g., psychologist). (*See Chapter IV: Psychological Readiness.*)

The emergency team is also responsible for the following:

- establishing and maintaining a telephone tree and the procedures for its use
- handling the media
- designating the duties of administration, teachers, and support staff in an emergency
- ensuring that adequate warning/alarm and public address systems are in place and functioning. Modes of communication for this purpose may include the following:

- public address system
- messenger
- driver/messenger
- e-mail
- telephone
- mobile phone
- switchboard
- reception
- newsletter
- assembly
- Student Council meeting
- press
- radio
- TV
- town meetings

- establishing evacuation procedures and safe havens
- providing any necessary supplies and equipment for each type of emergency
- providing direction for student behavior
- establishing the chain of command and the dissemination of information
- establishing a standing agreement with local medical practitioners and ambulance services
- ensuring the presence of on-campus first aide and a CPR-trained individual
- providing contingency plans and follow-up with teachers, staff, students, and community

### **Before An Emergency: Responsibilities of the Teachers and Staff**

Teachers and staff will have read and understood their pre-emergency responsibilities (*see Appendix #3 in this chapter*) and be familiar with all parts of the school handbook, especially concerning school trips. They will have participated in teacher/staff orientation meetings concerning emergencies. They will have received adequate information from in-service presentations to deal with potential student concerns and problems specific to the region. As part of the curriculum, they will have rehearsed emergency procedures with their students.

### **Before An Emergency: Responsibilities of the Parents**

It is imperative that parents and guardians ensure that the school has up-to-date contact information as well as medical history on their children. Parents should establish emergency procedures for home and outside the school; they should review and reinforce these procedures with their children on a regular basis. Parents can consult security personnel at their respective embassies or places of employment for information and/or literature on emergency procedures.

Open House meetings and other school-wide gatherings (e.g., parent-teacher association meetings) are important communication vehicles for parents to voice concerns they have about safety and to find out school plans for emergencies. The school administration and staff can use these venues to get a feel for the needs of the school community.

### **Before An Emergency: Responsibilities of the Students**

Students must understand that their safety is the primary concern of their teachers, supervisors, and school administrators. They should be made aware of the local situation and any possible threats to their safety and well-being. Through class discussion and activities, students should familiarize themselves with school emergency procedures. Prior to any school-sponsored trip, they should participate in a parent-student-chaperone meeting to review the rules and safety policies that govern

any school trip. Students should also have the opportunity to practice any necessary drills. It is recommended that emergency preparedness be taught as part of the curriculum.

### **Before An Emergency: Responsibilities of Others in the Community**

Friends, and other supporters of the school, should make every effort to actively participate in all meetings and open forums sponsored by the school. They should share their experiences and ideas with the school as concerns emergency preparedness.

### **During An Emergency: Responsibilities of the Emergency Team**

The ability to verify a potential or actual emergency depends on the type of crisis. An isolated school will rely heavily on notification from an embassy or consulate for major emergencies. Other emergencies that take place off campus must be verified directly from a parent or guardian, appointed spokesperson, or school chaperone. School heads will use their common sense to discern which sources of information are reliable.

Once an emergency is underway, the emergency team will do the following:

- Assume overall direction of school emergency procedures; issue information and directives to the teachers and staff.
- Account for the presence of all students and staff.
- Assume overall direction of internal and external communications.
- Direct evacuation of the school, if necessary.
- Oversee contact with school chaperones if an emergency has occurred on a school-sponsored field trip.
- Dispel rumor.
- Contact next of kin, where appropriate.

## **During An Emergency: Responsibilities of the Teachers and Staff**

Teachers are responsible for the supervision of students in their charge. Teachers who do not have a class at the onset of an emergency should report to the emergency team for instructions or use their common sense in making themselves useful.

During an emergency, teachers will do the following:

- Respond to the specific emergency as prescribed and direct the students in the appropriate emergency procedures.
- Contact the school, in the event that the emergency occurs during a field trip or other off-campus school-sponsored activity.
- Give clear, calm instructions to their students during the emergency.
- Remain with the students until released by the emergency team.
- Direct the evacuation of students under their supervision to designated areas according to signals, warnings, written notifications, or common sense.
- Take roll as soon as conditions allow.
- Report missing students to the emergency team and wait for instructions.
- Assess physical condition of students. Any students requiring first aid should receive it as soon as conditions allow.
- Keep order.
- Dispel rumor.

Depending on the size of the school, a support staff might include many individuals or only a handful. Those individuals not directly involved in student supervision should have received individual tasks and areas of responsibility from the emergency team prior to the emergency.

It is the responsibility of the emergency team to assess the amount of support available during a given emergency. The team should take into consideration the following tasks which may need to be accomplished prior to, during, and after an emergency and assign them to appropriate individuals (*see Chapter 2: Emergency Preparation, Procedures, and Drills*):

- Maintain equipment (fire extinguishers, cell phones, radio, batteries, generators, etc.), facilities (secure evacuation areas), and supplies (water, food).
- Shut off utilities as necessary.
- Conduct or direct rescue operations.
- Follow damage control procedures.
- If designated, communicate with the school community (Board members, parents via telephone tree, etc.).
- Dispel rumor.

Where necessary, the school should make every effort to inform parents as soon as possible, through appropriate channels (e.g., telephone tree), concerning what exactly has transpired, the situation of the students, what parents should do, and any other instructions from the school to parents. Calls should be brief but accurate. A script prepared beforehand might be helpful for staff and teachers who will activate the telephone tree.

As regards communication with the media, it is recommended that there be only one spokesperson (preferably the director/head/principal) who will speak to the press at the time of the crisis. All media inquiries should be referred to the director or other designated spokesperson. No staff member should speak or comment to the media. The spokesperson should attempt to be credible, honest, and accessible. Requested information could include a chronology of the incident, and the school's official policy or position on the matter.

### **During An Emergency: Responsibilities of the Parents**

Parents must understand that foremost in the minds of school administrators and staff, especially in the event of an emergency, is the safety of the children. It will be important for parents and guardians to be patient, but alert, observers until the school has communicated information and possible directives to them. (For small schools especially, the rumor mill will sometimes block the too-small switchboard and perhaps jeopardize emergency procedures.) If, however, parents have accurate and useful information that could help the school emergency team, they should make every effort to contact the school-designated spokesperson.

## **During An Emergency: Responsibilities of the Students**

The safety of children is the prime consideration in any emergency. Student cooperation is therefore crucial. Students will follow the directives given by their teachers or supervisors. They will work towards dispelling rumor. They will share and cooperate with their peers.

## **During An Emergency: Others in the Community**

Rumors tend to spread rapidly through the school community and can create chaos, especially if the community is small. Friends of the school can safeguard this tendency by dispelling rumors and awaiting accurate information from the school. As mentioned earlier, anyone with useful information that might help the school during the emergency should contact the spokesperson.

## **After an Emergency**

A post-emergency debriefing and an opportunity for the school community to share experiences and offer feedback is an important part of the healing process after an emergency. Just as important, this feedback and exchange will provide important lessons for future emergencies.

When the crisis is over, it will be important for the emergency team to meet with the school staff and discuss exactly what happened and the consequences involved. Once the staff, teachers, and administration have met and reviewed the emergency in its entirety and discussed follow-up procedure, it will then be necessary to meet with the students.

Depending on the nature of the crisis, a school-wide assembly might be warranted; however, a smaller forum of individual classroom visits or grade level visits might be more appropriate. The school should be prepared for the fact that parents may want to attend any assembly. A separate meeting with parents and other interested members of the community might, therefore, be advisable.



The emergency team should also meet with the following individuals: security officers from embassies and multinational companies who have a relationship with the school, local officials and authorities, and outside health care professionals; this should be done so that the school can consult these people to determine how well the school responded to the emergency. These same individuals will also need to be advised as to the present situation and any special plans of action.

In the event of school closure, a written announcement stating the fact, along with contact telephone numbers, must be made available as soon as possible to all members of the community, after the school consults with the outside group of experts mentioned above. If repatriation has occurred, it will be necessary to have up-to-date emergency contact addresses and telephone numbers for all families. The same list must be taken out of the country as part of the school effects for safeguarding (*see Chapter III: School Closure*).

## **Appendix #1**

### Sample letter to parents concerning general safety measures

“Dear Parents and Guardians,

In an effort to avoid accidents and to keep our children safe, we ask that you and your child strictly observe the following rules and regulations when coming to or spending time on campus.

Please find attached a telephone tree which will help facilitate and speed communication in the school community in the event of an unforeseen school closure or other emergency.

Finally, this notice also includes general emergency procedures for out of school, on the way to school, and during school time.

As always, the school strives to ensure the safety of our children at all times.”

- Each school should then list important traffic and safety rules regarding the following:
  - bicycles, skateboards, roller blades
  - safety on the school bus, in taxis, or in other means of transport
  - traffic rules of drop off/parking (no child left in car, etc.)
  - visitor registration
  - school supervision times
  - socializing area for parents, etc.
  
- A telephone tree should be provided to every staff member and student family. Parents should make sure that their contact numbers are correct. The telephone tree should include the following statement: Parents will receive information in a timely fashion. They should not, under any circumstances, contact people outside of the telephone tree nor should they attempt to contact the school directly. Phone lines must remain open!
  
- Out of school emergency: Parents should be advised to draw up a family plan of action should an emergency (e.g., typhoon, earthquake, social disturbance, break-in, etc.) occur when the child is not in school. This plan should cover the following situations: while the family is at home; if the family is separated; if the children are out playing or visiting friends.
  
- Emergency on the way to school: Parents should be advised to use their own discretion as to the safety of the situation for the child. Under no circumstances should the trip to school be undertaken if the parents deem it unsafe. In the event that an incident occurs on the way to school, parents should be advised to go to the nearest hospital, evacuation center, police station, etc.
  
- Emergency during school: Parents should be advised to make sure that the school has all the necessary medical information about their children as well as copies of their children's health cards. Parents should know that, in the event of an emergency, their children will be advised as to the proper course of action. The school's emergency procedures manual outlines procedure for each type of possible emergency; parents may peruse this manual if they wish.

## Appendix #2

### Parent Notification Form

Note: This form should be filled out by every family at the beginning of each school year. One form should be completed for each child.

Student's name: \_\_\_\_\_ Present grade: \_\_\_\_\_

Father's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Mother's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Home address: \_\_\_\_\_

Home phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

Father's work number: \_\_\_\_\_

Mother's work number: \_\_\_\_\_

Mobile phone/pager numbers: \_\_\_\_\_

Home e-mail address: \_\_\_\_\_

Work e-mail address(es): \_\_\_\_\_

Emergency address outside of country: \_\_\_\_\_

How do your children normally come to and go home from school? \_\_\_\_\_

Please give the names of two persons who will assume responsibility for the care of your child in case you cannot be reached:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship to family: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship to family: \_\_\_\_\_

Please specify hospital of preference in case of a dire emergency and you cannot be reached:

Name of hospital: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

*I have read the attached letter about school procedures should an emergency occur. I understand that the school will use these contingency plans so that all students remain safe. I also understand that the school will make every effort to contact me, or the emergency contact persons named above, to advise me of the situation.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
parent's signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
date

## **Appendix #3**

### Teacher responsibilities in the event of an emergency

It is recommended that this outline be included in the Teacher Handbook, under “Teacher Responsibilities.” Teachers will follow specific guidelines and directives issued by the director and/or the emergency team.

Before an emergency happens, the teacher will do the following:

- Keep up-to-date on the local situation (e.g. social unrest, extreme weather conditions, etc.).
- Know and understand the emergency procedures and survival techniques for fires, bomb threats, intrusions/terrorist attacks, earthquakes, chemical explosions, etc.
- Check that all classrooms have emergency exit directions posted and that everyone knows the route.
- Provide instruction and practice for students in emergency procedures and survival techniques.
- Keep a current class list readily accessible at all times in order to take roll in an emergency.
- Have planned activities (e.g., music, games, etc.) for use during periods of confinement to lessen the possible tension of an emergency situation.

During an emergency, the teacher will do the following:

- Respond to the specific emergency as prescribed and direct the students in the appropriate emergency procedures.
- Contact the school, in the event that the emergency occurs during a field trip or other off-campus school-sponsored activity.
- Give clear, calm instructions to their students during the emergency.
- Remain with the students until released by the emergency team.
- Direct the evacuation of students under their supervision to designated areas according to signals, warnings, written notifications, or common sense.
- Take roll as soon as conditions allow.
- Report missing students to the emergency team and wait for instructions.
- Assess physical condition of students. Any students requiring first aid should receive it as soon as conditions allow.
- Keep order.
- Dispel rumor.

After an emergency, the teacher will do the following:

- Debrief with administration.
- Work with colleagues and the administration to determine the successes and failures of the emergency response.
- Follow up with students, taking care to watch for signs of distress.
- Schedule parent-teacher conferences as necessary.

## **Index**

CEESA Survey on Emergency Preparation Responses, Compiled by Gregory A. Hedger, June 1997  
Security Awareness Overseas, An Overview, United States Department of State Overseas Advisory Council (a good book for families to use at home)  
Hong Kong International School Crisis Plan, 96-97, General Crisis Plan pp. 1-4  
International School of Prague, Emergency Action Plan  
Cairo American College Campus Security Handbook, 1997  
St. Maur International School Disaster/Emergency Plan, 1997  
International Community School of Abidjan, Emergency Action Plan, 1997  
Jakarta International School Emergency Procedures, 1996  
Crisis Management in International Schools, SGIS Heads Meeting, Sept. 1996, case studies approach  
Singapore American School Policy and Administrative Guidelines pertaining to Emergencies and Crisis Response, 1997  
International School of Islamabad, Emergency Security Planning Guidelines, 1995

The following updated web site and its links were also helpful in the preparation of this manual:

Department of State – **[www.state.gov](http://www.state.gov)**  
Travel and Living Abroad  
Emergencies Abroad  
Travel Warnings  
US Citizens Abroad  
Overseas Schools  
Overseas Security Advisory Council  
Family Liaison Office

Links to other sources of information:

Federal Emergency Management Agency – **[www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov)**

## **Chapter II – Emergency Preparation, Procedures, and Drills**

Does your school have the following in place?

- Emergency kits for each classroom
- Emergency transportation procedures
- Emergency drill schedule
- Legal counsel
- Insurance
- Plans of designated responsibilities during an emergency for the emergency team, administration, teachers, staff, students, and parents
- Emergency fire procedure and drill
- Bomb threat procedure and drill
- Terrorism/civil disturbance emergency procedure and drill
- Natural disaster emergency procedure and drill
- Student/staff injury procedure
- Death in the school community procedure
- Emergency supplies
- First aid kits
- Bomb Threat Report Form
- Injury Report Form

*“It was at the International School of Curacao in the fall of 1990, my first year there. The school is situated on about five acres within a mile from a very large oil refinery called ISLA. The island relied on ISLA economically, and consequently were not as vigilant as they might have been regarding safety and ecological issues.*

*It was about ten in the morning when the board president called me, saying that there was a fire at ISLA and that we should consider evacuating our campus. For the next fifteen minutes we tried to obtain information about the fire, to no avail. Some of our parents were highly placed at the company, but they all had the same line, "no problem". We did learn that area schools were evacuating. Apparently they knew something that we did not.*

*However, in the next ten minutes, it became very clear that we also had to evacuate. Flames started to shoot up from ISLA and the fire was spreading. There was also a huge black cloud that was forming over the plant.*

*Using our trusty phone tree, we started calling parents. The instructions were for them to come to the school within the half hour or meet us at a prearranged pick-up site about ten miles from the school, upwind and away from the fire. During that half hour, we arranged transportation, had all students remain in the classrooms, and organized pick-ups for parents who did come to school. About half of the students (150) left and the others were transported to our safe site. The fire continued to get worse.*

*The school was totally evacuated within thirty minutes, and at the safe site parents collected their children within the hour. It all went well.*

*A couple of asides: It was disconcerting that ISLA did not give us the straight story about the fire. It was eventually contained, but there definitely was the chance that it would have spread, and worse, even explode. There was a danger to us, but because of PR factors, they would not be honest about it.*

*We also asked them what would have happened if the plant had indeed exploded. The answer we got was that it really did not matter where we were on the island—we would all have bought the farm. Comforting.”*

*Mr. David Buck  
Director  
International School of Prague*

## **Chapter Two - Emergency Preparation, Procedures, and Drills**

The best way to deal with an emergency is to be prepared for it. It is important to make sure all emergency information is updated and accessible, and that every staff member is knowledgeable in all emergency procedures. Being prepared for an emergency can lessen, and often prevent, injuries and loss of life as well as damage to property.

### **Emergency Teams**

The emergency team shall be responsible for the following:

- preparing emergency policies and procedures
- conducting regular drills for each type of emergency
- implementing emergency policies and procedures during an actual emergency
- providing leadership in a crisis situation

*(See Chapter 1 for more specific details on the emergency team.)*

The emergency team should meet regularly to update and review emergency policies and procedures. The emergency team should also meet regularly—once a semester—with the staff to review emergency policies and procedures. These policies and procedures should be clearly outlined in a staff handbook and distributed to all staff members. *(See “Handbooks” in Chapter 1 for a detailed checklist on what information the staff handbook should contain.)*

### **Basic Preparation**

## **Emergency Kit**

Each teacher should have an emergency kit, which should be taken by the teacher whenever he/she has to leave the school with his/her class in an emergency situation.



The emergency kit should contain the following:

- an attendance list
- name tags with safety pins for all students (recommended for grades prekindergarten through fifth grade); the name tags should have the following information on them: student's name, address, telephone number, age, school address and telephone number, appropriate embassy/consulate's address and telephone number
- Staff Handbook
- school telephone directory
- transportation lists (i.e., students who ride the bus, students who are driven by car, students who walk)
- injury report forms
- student insurance information

These items should be kept in a sturdy plastic envelope in an accessible place in the classroom.

The emergency kit should also be taken on all field trips.

### **Student Preparation**

Teachers should regularly review emergency procedures with their students. At the beginning of every school year, each teacher should walk his/her students through each type of emergency drill. Teachers should present and discuss the following details with their students:

- types of emergencies
- procedures for dealing with these types of emergencies
- proper student behavior during an emergency
- preventative measures to circumvent emergency situations
- basic first aid

*(See section "Procedures and Drills" in this chapter for more specific information. Teachers can refer to this section when making their presentations to the students on emergency procedure.)*

## **Safe Havens**

Safe havens are used to provide temporary protection until help arrives. Every school should establish a number of safe havens for students in case of an emergency evacuation. There are several types of safe havens:

On-site: An on-site safe haven is usually a large room or hall (e.g. gymnasium, auditorium, etc.) into which the entire student body and staff can fit. (In larger schools, there may be several on-site safe havens.) If possible, an on-site safe haven should have access to a telephone line and bathrooms, as well as secure doors and windows to protect against very severe weather conditions or terrorist attack.

Off-site: An off-site safe haven is a place to go when the school has become a dangerous place (e.g. during a bomb threat). The safe haven should be close enough to walk to yet distant enough to be out of harm's way. Students are kept at the safe haven until parents can come and pick them up. Staff members' or students' apartments often serve as safe havens. (Some schools may have access to facilities in hotels, companies, municipal buildings, etc.) Safe havens should be chosen at the beginning of the year, and maps to the various safe havens should be provided in the staff and parent handbooks.

Diplomatic: In case of intense civil disturbance or natural disaster, students will remain at home and follow the directives of their respective embassies. If the situation necessitates, the respective embassy will serve as a safe haven or provide another facility to serve this purpose.

## **Transportation**

Transportation needs might vary with each emergency. (*See section "Procedures and Drills" in this chapter for more specific information on transportation procedure as pertains to each particular type of emergency.*)

If the school uses a bus company, the school's emergency team should apprise the bus company of its emergency procedures. The emergency team needs to inform the bus company of student pick-up points—locations may vary according to the type of emergency. Bus drivers should be familiar with the pick-up location during an evacuation (this location might be further away from the school building, as in the case of a bomb threat) as well as the locations of various safe havens.

The emergency team will be responsible for coordinating transportation during an emergency. If the school does not employ a bus company for transportation, then the emergency team will contact the students' parents. During emergencies, students will not be permitted to leave the school unaccompanied by a parent or an authorized adult.

### **Drill Schedule**

The emergency team will organize the drill schedule. At the beginning of the school year, there should be one announced drill for each type of emergency. Before the announced drill, teachers should go over the respective emergency procedure with their classes. Subsequent drills should not be announced, so as to gauge the reaction and performance of the staff and students. A poorly executed drill, or problems encountered during the drill, should be addressed immediately after the drill to insure that such problems will not occur during an actual emergency.

The emergency team will decide on the frequency of drills. The scheduling of drills will vary with each school—the emergency team must decide which crises are more actual for its school. For example, in some areas, schools experience frequent earthquakes—in other areas, civil disturbance is a constant threat. Drills for very likely emergencies should be scheduled monthly; drills for less likely emergencies can perhaps be scheduled quarterly or biannually. Fire is a threat to every school, so fire drills should be conducted every month.

### **Legal Counsel**

The school should have access to legal counsel in case of an injury or death on campus, intentional damage to property by host country nationals, etc.

## **Insurance**

Aside from the usual contractual insurance benefits for staff, the following types of insurance are recommended:

- insurance for students when traveling out of the host country on a school field trip
- general liability insurance to cover injuries on school premises
- school property insurance to cover theft, damage caused by natural disasters, etc.

The school should investigate the various insurance policies available and choose those which best suit its needs. Good insurance policies will help the school get back on its feet should a major crisis occur.

## **Procedures and Drills**

Different emergencies require different responses. It is important to have regular drills for those emergencies which could conceivably occur in a school's host country. Outlined below are suggested responses for dealing with several specific emergencies. Every school is different; therefore, each school must tailor the procedures in this section to suit its specific needs and conditions. (The procedures in this section are for actual emergencies; the emergency team will decide how to enact them as drills.)

The school must make the following preliminary preparations:

- Routes of egress must be clearly indicated on maps of the school grounds. Routes of egress may vary according to emergency, so it is important to carefully consider each type of emergency situation and provide appropriate ways for everyone to exit safely. Routes of egress must be prominently posted in each classroom.
- A specific signal or alarm must be chosen for each type of emergency (e.g., PA announcement, tones or bells, etc.)
- Staff members' responsibilities during an emergency must be clearly delineated. Staff must be aware of the following: who is responsible for which students; where each staff member should go during each type of emergency; who is responsible for shutting off the gas, checking elevators, checking for suspicious

items during a sweep after a bomb threat, etc.; who is responsible for contacting the appropriate authorities, parents, transportation company, etc. The emergency team will be responsible for coordinating these duties.

- Staff should know where the following are located in relation to their classroom or office: electrical circuit breakers, fire alarm, nearest fire extinguisher, first aid kit.

There are three very important things to remember in any school emergency: (1) the safety of the students is paramount, (2) it is crucial not to panic, and (3) careful records (witnesses, incidents, actions taken, etc.) should be kept at every stage of an emergency, if possible.

## **Fire**

- The fire signal is given.
- Students should line up quietly and prepare to exit; teachers take their emergency kits and lead the students out according to the exit routes determined by the emergency team. Doors should be left closed but unlocked; lights should be turned off.
- Administrative/support staff members should check their areas of responsibility to make sure all students have moved out of the area (computer rooms, practice rooms, athletic areas, elevators, etc.); turn off all lights; close any doors left open; check for any remaining students; take the first aid kit(s) and mobile phone(s).
- Teachers should take attendance immediately upon arriving at the designated spot outside. Any missing children should be reported at once to the administrator on duty.
- Everyone must wait for the all-clear signal; after it is given, all should return to the building in a quiet and orderly fashion.

In case of an actual fire:

- After everyone is safely out of the building, the emergency team must determine whether there is an actual fire. If there is a fire, the fire department should be called immediately. If a school shares its building with another organization, school, or business, the school should notify these neighbors immediately. Other buildings in the immediate vicinity of the school should also be notified.

- If any students or staff members are seriously injured, the emergency procedure for injury goes into effect. (*See section “Student/Staff Injury” in this chapter.*)
- After the fire has been extinguished, the emergency team must determine if it is safe to return to the building. If not, the students must be evacuated. (If it is close to the end of the school day, the students can wait for their usual transportation. If it is early in the day and the weather is not too severe, the students can wait in place while the telephone tree is activated and parents come to pick them up.)
- If the weather is severe (heavy rain, intense cold, etc.) or if the premises becomes dangerous, the students should be taken to the designated off-site safe havens to wait for their parents to pick them up. The emergency team will activate the telephone tree. Students must remain at the off-site safe havens until a parent or authorized person comes to pick them up.
- The emergency team then must assess the damage and take appropriate measures. For very minor damage, the emergency team will decide when to reopen the school. For severe damage to the school premises and property, an emergency session of the School Board must be convened to decide where and when the operation of the school will resume. Parents and staff will be notified via the telephone tree of whatever decisions the School Board makes.

### General Fire Safety Tips

- A fire larger than one in a wastepaper basket should be left to professionals. Staff members should not try to fight larger fires unless they have special training.
- One should not run if one’s clothing catches fire—running fans and spreads the flames. A person on fire should stop, drop, and roll. Rolling in a coat, blanket, or on the floor helps to smother the flames. (It is strongly recommended that schools have fire blankets on hand—they are made specifically for this purpose.)
- When planning to enter a closed room in a burning building, the door should first be felt with the palm of the hand—if it is hot, it should not be opened!

## **Bomb Threat**

- The person receiving the bomb threat will fill out the Bomb Threat Report Form and report the call to the chief administrator of the school immediately. (*See Bomb Threat Report Form: Appendix # 1 of this chapter.*)
- The signal will be given or an announcement will be made for everyone to evacuate the building.
- Students may collect their coats and book bags if these things are in the classroom or in the immediate vicinity (students should not be allowed to go to their lockers if the lockers are not nearby); the students should then line up quietly and prepare to exit. Teachers should do a quick sweep of their rooms, looking for any suspicious boxes, packages or items. Teachers then take their emergency kits and lead the students out according to the exit routes determined by the emergency team. Teachers should not use any electrical switches since this could possibly detonate the bomb, if there is one.
- Administrative/support staff members should check their areas of responsibility to make sure all students have moved out of the area (computer rooms, practice rooms, athletic areas, elevators, etc.); they should take the first aid kit(s) and mobile phone(s). (Mobile phones should not be used in the immediate vicinity of the school as it is possible for them to detonate bombs.)
- Teachers should take attendance immediately upon arriving at the designated spot outside. Any missing children should be reported at once to the administrator on duty.
- Checkers should begin checking their designated areas. (The request of an employee not to participate in the check should be honored.) Checkers should sweep their respective areas, looking for suspicious items; i.e., boxes, packages, or other containers. Suspicious items should not be touched! They should be reported at once to the emergency team.
- The emergency team should then contact the American Embassy (or other appropriate embassy) and/or the police and report the incident and their findings. The emergency team will then decide whether or not to return to school and resume classes.

- If the school is deemed unsafe, then evacuation procedure will be implemented. If it is close to the end of the school day, the students can wait for their usual transportation. If it is early in the day and the weather is not too severe, the students can wait in place while the telephone tree is activated and parents come to pick them up.
- If the weather is severe (heavy rain, intense cold, etc.) or if the premises becomes dangerous, the students should be taken to the designated off-site safe havens to wait for their parents to pick them up. The emergency team will activate the telephone tree. Students must remain at the off-site safe havens until a parent or authorized person comes to pick them up.
- Unless there is damage to the school or continuation of a threat, school will resume the next day. If the school is to remain closed, everyone will be notified via the telephone tree.

### Bomb Checking Tips

- Personnel should be familiar with the area they search.
- The checker should not move, jar, or touch anything throughout the search process.
- The initial search should be conducted of those places generally accessible to the public.
- The checkers should search from the outside and work inside, from the lowest level up.
- Bomb removal should never be attempted by inexperienced personnel.
- A suspicious device should never be immersed in water.
- Bombs can be armed and detonated in numerous ways (timing devices, photo-electric, anti-disturbance). The construction and appearance of a device is limited only by the imagination of the perpetrator.
- Typical packing forms of bombs are brief cases; hollowed-out boxes; cigar boxes; unusual parcels, boxes or wrapped packages.



## **Terrorism/Civil Disturbance**

Most schools are assisted by the American Embassy (or another embassy) with regard to notification of an existing or potential security threat. In most instances, it will be the Embassy notifying the school of a threat. However, the school should notify the Embassy on a priority basis of any situation that has come to the attention of the staff, which may affect the security of the school. Examples of what to report to the Embassy include sightings of riots or demonstrations; reports of possible terrorist acts; and observations of suspicious persons/vehicles in the vicinity of the school.

The primary method of communication is the telephone. Should the telephone system become inoperative, the emergency team will determine what alternative means of communication will be used. Possible alternatives are using mobile phones or two-way radios; sending a staff member to the Embassy; establishing an off-site command center at a nearby residence with a working telephone; using a nearby pay phone.

Staff members should be familiar with the emergency procedures for the following scenarios:

### Possibility of violence or hostile action.

The school will work in conjunction with the American Embassy and any other participating embassy which may have pertinent information concerning the situation. Depending upon the situation, the emergency team will decide if the school will remain open or close.

If the school remains open, the following course of action should be taken:

- The American Embassy (or another appropriate embassy) should be notified that there is concern over the possible threat of violence; the school should request that the appropriate authorities (e.g., the police) be notified.
- The emergency team should determine if there is to be a change in transportation (e.g., change in times; parents/embassy to pick up instead of using the bus company).

- All doors, windows and gates should be secured. Curtains, blinds, and shutters should be closed.
- The on-site safe haven(s) should be prepared: food and necessary equipment should be moved to the safe haven(s) if they aren't there already.
- Recess, physical education, and any other outdoor activities should be canceled.
- Occupants of off-site safe havens should be contacted so that they will be prepared to accept students and staff should conditions warrant.
- The emergency team should establish 'check-in' times with the Embassy. These are predetermined times that the Embassy will expect to receive calls from the school to ensure that all is well.
- The emergency team should arrange for someone to make frequent checks of the situation if the disturbance is expected in the vicinity of the school. The person watching the situation should be able to communicate with the school quickly (i.e., via pay phone, mobile phone, two-way radio, etc.) in order to give warning of any new developments.
- The emergency team should assign a staff member to watch the perimeter of the school from a safe location for surveillance, approaching crowds, suspicious vehicles, etc.

If the school is to be closed, the following course of action should be taken:

- The emergency team should immediately notify the American Embassy (or another appropriate embassy) that a decision has been made to close the school.
- The emergency team will notify local authorities and the other embassies with student nationals at the school of the decision to close. The telephone tree will be activated after what course of action to take has been decided.
- The emergency team will determine where the children are taken. There are several possibilities: school buses will take the children home; the respective embassies will provide transportation for their student nationals;

parents will come to the school to pick their children up; children will be taken to off-site safe havens.

If the children are taken to off-site havens, the following course of action should be taken:

- The emergency team should designate staff members to check the routes to the respective safe havens to ensure that they are safe.
- A command post should be established at each safe haven before transporting the students.
- The American Embassy and other embassies with student nationals should be notified that the children have been taken to safe havens.
- Remaining staff should secure the school building as much as time permits. The Embassy should be notified when the building has been closed and the last staff member has left.

Danger is imminent.

If an attack is imminent and there does not appear to be time for an evacuation of the school, the following course of action should be taken:

- A signal will be given or an announcement will be made that everyone is to proceed to their respective on-site safe haven(s).
- The building should immediately be secured by locking all exterior doors and gates; closing all windows; drawing any curtains, blinds or shutters. Teachers will be responsible for securing their own rooms; the emergency team will designate who will be responsible for other areas.
- Teachers will lead his/her students to their respective on-site safe havens. After everyone has gathered in their respective safe haven, attendance will be taken. The emergency team will dispatch one or two staff members to make a final sweep of the building to make sure no one is still outside the safe haven(s).

- The emergency team will inform the American Embassy (or another appropriate embassy) that the students have been evacuated to on-site safe havens. (If the situation is dire, the emergency team might opt to contact the local police first before contacting the Embassy.)
- Once everyone has been locked into the safe haven(s), it will become difficult to determine when it is safe to come out. Under no circumstances should the safe haven doors be opened unless there is a confirmed ‘all-clear’ signal. The best thing to do is to wait for a call from the American Embassy to confirm the ‘all-clear.’

Attack without warning.

In the event of an attack without warning, the following course of action should be taken:

- The students should be directed to lie on the floor, preferably under desks or anything providing protection.
- Teachers should close and lock their classroom doors, and close curtains if possible without endangering life.
- Upon securing the classroom, teachers should also remain on the floor until further instructions are received.
- If the signal to evacuate to the on-site safe havens is given, teachers should instruct the students to keep away from the windows and to keep as low as possible.
- If any students or staff members are seriously injured, the emergency procedure for injury goes into effect, if at all possible. (*See section “Student/Staff Injury” in this chapter.*)
- Teachers should also be aware that they may have to move the students out of the building because of fire.

If the political situation or a natural calamity in the host country becomes life threatening to the school population, the School Board will conduct an emergency session to decide whether or not to close the school on a long term or permanent basis. Students and their families as well as expatriate staff will be assisted in evacu-

ation by their respective embassies; the school's emergency team will carry out the procedure for a force majeure closing. *(See Chapter 3 for more specific information regarding force majeure closure.)*

## **Natural Disaster**

For many schools, the threat of a natural disaster is a real one. Earthquakes, floods, and typhoons often come with little or no warning, so it is imperative that the staff and students be well-versed in emergency procedure concerning natural disasters.

### Earthquakes

In case of an earthquake, the following course of action should be taken:

- If indoors, teachers should keep their students inside. While shielding their heads with their hands and elbows, students should move away from windows, shelves, and heavy objects and furniture that may fall. They should not be under light fixtures or other suspended objects. If in the classroom, students should take cover under desks, tables, or other heavy furniture.
- If in a hall, stairway, gymnasium or other area where no cover is available, the students should move to an interior wall. They should turn away from windows, kneel alongside the wall, bend their heads close to their knees, cover the sides of their heads with their elbows, and clasp hands firmly behind neck.
- If in the library, the students should immediately move away from windows and bookshelves and take cover under a desk or a table.
- If in a laboratory or kitchen, all burners should be extinguished (if possible) before taking cover. Students should stay clear of hazardous chemicals that may spill.
- If in the school theater, students should duck and cover and remain in place until the tremors subside. An uncontrolled, panic-driven exit by the students should be avoided at all costs!

- If outdoors, students should move to an open space, away from buildings and overhead power lines. Students should lie down or crouch low to the ground (since legs will not be steady). Teachers and students should constantly keep an eye on their surroundings to be aware of dangers that may demand movement.
- If in a school bus or other vehicle, the vehicle should pull over and stop, away from power lines, bridges, overpasses, and buildings. Students should remain in their seats and hold on.

Once the emergency team has judged that the quake has ended, the emergency procedure for fire should be followed.

- Students should line up quietly and prepare to exit; teachers take their emergency kits and lead the students out according to the exit routes determined by the emergency team. Doors should be left closed but unlocked.
- Administrative/support staff members should check their areas of responsibility to make sure all students have moved out of the area (computer rooms, practice rooms, athletic areas, elevators, etc.); turn off all lights; close any doors left open; check for any remaining students; take the first aid kit(s) and mobile phone(s).
- Teachers should take attendance immediately upon arriving at the designated spot outside. Any missing children should be reported at once to the administrator on duty.
- If any students are seriously injured, the emergency procedure for injury goes into effect. (*See section “Student/Staff Injury” in this chapter.*)
- After everyone is safely out of the building, the emergency team must determine whether it is safe or not to return to the building. If the decision is made to return to the building, stoves or furnaces should not be used until it has been declared safe to do so by the local authorities. The students should be told not to touch any fallen electrical wires outside.

- If the building is deemed unsafe, the students must be evacuated. If it is close to the end of the school day and the roads have been declared safe, the students can wait for their usual transportation. If it is early in the day and the weather is not too severe, the students can wait in place while the telephone tree is activated and parents come to pick them up.
- If the weather is severe (heavy rain, intense cold, etc.) or if the premises becomes dangerous, the students should be taken to the designated off-site safe havens to wait for their parents to pick them up. The emergency team will activate the telephone tree. Students must remain at the off-site safe havens until a parent or authorized person comes to pick them up.
- The emergency team then must assess the damage and take appropriate measures. For very minor damage, the emergency team will decide when to reopen the school. For severe damage to the school premises and property, an emergency session of the School Board must be convened to decide where and when the operation of the school will resume. Parents and staff will be notified via the telephone tree of whatever decisions the Board makes.
- In case of extremely severe damage to the city in which the school is located, the students may be kept at the school (if it isn't too damaged or dangerous itself) or at the safe havens overnight (or longer) until conditions in the city are declared safe.

Tornadoes, floods, storms, etc.

In case of a tornado or flood or other natural disaster, the following course of action should be taken:

- The emergency team will determine whether or not to cancel school for the day, dismiss students early, or evacuate to off-site safe havens. If weather conditions are extremely serious (thus making driving dangerous), the emergency team may opt to keep students at school in the on-site safe haven(s).

- If the students are to be evacuated, the parents will be contacted via the telephone tree in regards to where to pick their children up (at the school or at the off-site safe havens).
- The emergency team then must assess the damage and take appropriate measures. For very minor damage, the emergency team will decide when to reopen the school. For severe damage to the school premises and property, an emergency session of the School Board must be convened to decide where and when the operation of the school will resume. Parents and staff will be notified via the telephone tree of whatever decisions the Board makes.

### **Student/Staff Injury**

It is important to handle student and staff injuries carefully and sensitively. The following course of action is recommended whenever a student or staff member is injured on campus:

- A staff member should remain with the injured person and send another staff member (or a reliable student if no other staff members are present) for the school nurse or an administrator to assist.
- Staff members or reliable students should move any gathering students away from the area. Any students not directly involved should be sent to their next class, the library, or a supervised area.
- The school nurse should determine if additional medical treatment is necessary. If there is no health professional on campus, the chief administrator of the school will have to decide whether or not to call an ambulance.
- If the injured person is a student, the student's parents should be called. If the student is conscious and the injury not very serious, the parents can decide whether to pick up their child and take him/her to the doctor or let him/her finish the school day. If the injury is extremely serious, an ambulance should be called immediately—the student should not be moved in the meantime. (Note: At the beginning of each year the school should require that each student's parents fill out an Emergency Contacts Form [*see suggested form: Chapter I, Appendix # 2*]. This form provides people to contact in case of an emergency should the parents be unavailable.)



- The school nurse or a staff member should accompany the injured person in the ambulance.
- Circumstances concerning the accident should be documented and an Injury Report Form should be filled out. (*See Injury Report Form: Appendix #2 of this chapter.*)
- An announcement about the incident should be made to dispel any rumors. If the incident was very serious, teachers should discuss it with their students. Time should be allowed for grief and discussion. Students should be allowed to express their grief and openly discuss their feelings, fears, and concerns.
- Any student who is upset by the incident should be allowed to talk to a counselor or an administrator.

Note: when NOT to move an injured person:

- The person is unconscious, not breathing, or severely bleeding.
- A back or neck injury is suspected.
- An arm, leg, or pelvis is suspected to be broken.

Note: During a school emergency, it may not be possible to follow the above procedure as outlined; however, if the injury is serious, the emergency team must do its utmost to make sure that the injured person gets medical attention as soon as possible.

### **Death in the Community**

If the death occurs on campus, the following course of action should be taken:

- A staff member should remain with the deceased person and send another staff member (or a reliable student if no other staff members are present) for the school nurse or an administrator to assist.
- Staff members or reliable students should move any gathering students away from the area. Any students not directly involved should be sent to their next class, the library, or a supervised area.

- The police and an ambulance should be called.
- Students who witnessed the incident should be gathered into an appropriate office or room for counseling. (Professional counselors should be hired for the interim if the school does not have any of its own counselors.) (*See Chapter 4: Psychological Readiness for more details.*)
- Students who are in class at the time should be kept in their classrooms, especially if the body is in a visible area. (Students who are not in class at the time should be gathered into the auditorium or other appropriate area.) Students will be allowed to leave their classrooms after the situation has been resolved.
- An announcement concerning the following day's schedule should be made to the students. A schedule in writing should also be provided if possible.

The administration should do the following:

- The immediate family of the deceased person should be contacted.
- The administration should meet with the emergency team and make decisions regarding early dismissal and/or schedule changes.
- The campus should be closed to the media.
- Legal counsel should be contacted.
- The emergency team should discuss what information is to be given to the parents and students.

If students are to be dismissed:

- The school's transportation company should be contacted.
- The emergency team will activate the telephone tree to notify parents of the early dismissal. If the school does not use a transportation company, parents will be asked to pick up their children.
- After the children have been dismissed, the staff will meet to receive accurate information regarding the death. The staff must discuss the procedures to be followed when the students return. At this point, the staff should be allowed to express their grief and openly discuss their feelings, fears, and concerns.

When students return to school after the incident, the following course of action should be taken:

- Students should be directed to their homerooms. Each teacher should announce the death of the student or staff member to their students and any of the known facts concerning the death.
- Time should be allowed for grief and discussion. Students should be allowed to express their grief and openly discuss their feelings, fears, and concerns.
- The counseling office or administration should set up crisis centers in the school. If students react strongly and/or appear to be very upset by the news of the death, they should be sent to one of the crisis centers, with an escort if necessary. Professional counselors should be available at all times during this period. (*See Chapter 4: Psychological Readiness for more details.*)
- If individual students are extremely upset, their parents will be called.
- Students should be encouraged to attend their regular classes as soon as possible; however, individual students will be allowed more time for grieving, if necessary. Staff members should be especially sensitive to and aware of the students' needs and concerns throughout this period.
- If a funeral is to be held, the time and location should be announced. Particular funeral customs in relation to the deceased person's culture should be explained.

### **Field Trips**

When taking students on field trips to different countries, staff members should have the following:

- Emergency kit
- First aid kit
- The addresses and telephone numbers of the American Embassy (and other appropriate embassies) in the countries to be visited
- The addresses and telephone numbers of hospitals in the cities to be visited
- Mobile telephone

Should a serious injury or death occur while on the field trip, the staff member should do the following:

- Call the American Embassy (or the embassy of the injured or deceased person) immediately for advice. If no one is available at the embassy called, then a hospital should be contacted directly.

- Call the school and inform the chief administrator of what has happened.

The administration should then do the following:

- Contact the immediate family of the injured or deceased person.
- The administration should meet with the emergency team and brief them on the incident.
- Contact legal counsel.
- The emergency team should discuss what information is to be given to the parents and students.

If the incident concerned a serious injury, then the following course of action should be taken upon the students' return from the field trip:

- An announcement about the incident should be made to dispel any rumors. Teachers should discuss the incident with their students. Time should be allowed for grief and discussion. Students should be allowed to express their grief and openly discuss their feelings, fears, and concerns.
- Any student who is upset by the incident should be allowed to talk to a counselor or an administrator.

If the incident concerned the death of a student or staff member, then the following course of action should be taken upon the students' return from the field trip:

- Students should be directed to their homerooms. Each teacher should announce the death of the student or staff member to their students and any of the known facts concerning the death.
- Time should be allowed for grief and discussion. Students should be allowed to express their grief and openly discuss their feelings, fears, and concerns.
- The counseling office or administration should set up crisis centers in the school. If students react strongly and/or appear to be very upset by the news of the death, they should be sent to one of the crisis centers, with an escort if necessary. (*See Chapter 4: Psychological Readiness for more details.*)
- If individual students are extremely upset, their parents will be called.

- Students should be encouraged to attend their regular classes as soon as possible; however, individual students will be allowed more time for grieving, if necessary. Staff members should be especially sensitive to and aware of the students' needs and concerns throughout this period.
- If a funeral is to be held, the time and location should be announced. Particular funeral customs in relation to the deceased person's culture should be explained.

### **Emergency Supplies and Equipment**

An important aspect of emergency preparedness is having the right supplies and equipment on hand. Supplies and equipment should be bought and in place before the beginning of each school year.

### **First Aid Kits**

First aid kits should be easily accessible by every staff member. If the school uses a transportation company, there should be a first aid kit in every vehicle. First aid kits should be taken on every field trip and excursion out of the school.

The basic first aid kit should contain the following:

- Eye wash/eye drops
- Eye patch
- Antiseptic wipes
- Hydrogen peroxide
- Skin cleanser (e.g., Betadine)
- 2 pressure dressings
- 3 sterile gauze pads (4 x 4)
- 3 sterile gauze pads (3 x 3)
- Ace bandages (1 ½")
- Ace bandages (2 ½")
- 2 triangular bandages
- 1 tube of antiseptic cream
- 1" nylon non-allergic tape
- 4 pairs of latex gloves

- Large Band-aides
- Small Band-aides
- 1 set of leg splints
- 1 set of arm splints

Each school has different needs, so it may be necessary to add some items. The emergency team should go over the composition of the first aid kits to make sure that they contain everything the school would need in a situation where first aid needs to be administered.

### **Safe Haven Supplies and Equipment**

The on- and off-site safe havens should have supplies to support students and staff during an emergency. During and after a particularly severe natural disaster or dangerous political situation, students and staff may have to live at the school for several days (or even longer) until conditions are safe.

The emergency team should carefully consider what kinds of supplies and equipment (and in what quantity) would be needed to sustain the school during an extended stay in the safe havens. Below is a suggested list:

- Crowbars
- 1/2" ropes
- Crescent wrenches
- CB equipment and antenna
- Mobile phone
- Wide plastic tape/duct tape
- Shovels
- Hammers
- Pliers
- Blankets
- Axes
- Toweling/sheets (for triangular bandages)
- Large flashlights and batteries

- Portable radios and batteries
- Safety pins
- Needles and thread
- Bar soap
- Plastic trash bags
- Plastic kitchen bags
- Paper cups
- Sponges
- Buckets
- Work gloves
- Toilet paper
- Helmets
- Wet wipes
- Can openers (non-electric)
- First aid supplies
- Fire blankets
- Food
- Water
- AM/FM transistor radio

### **Communications Equipment**

Every school should have a back-up communications system in case the telephone lines fail. CB radios, two-way radios, mobile phones are all useful. (Some schools in troubled areas maintain radio contact with the American Embassy or another appropriate embassy.) Mobile phones are especially useful since they are small and powerful, and can also be utilized when traveling out of the country. (*See Chapter 1 for more details.*)

### **Campus Safety Tips**

- A fire alarm system is a must; a security alarm system is recommended. If the school is located in a city where civil disturbance occurs frequently, the hiring of guards and security personnel should be seriously considered.

- Any visitors to the school should be checked in at reception and escorted to their destination.
- Both staff members and students should be well-versed in first aid and the school's emergency procedures. The school should provide training in CPR and first aid for all its staff members on an annual basis.
- Both staff members and students should be made aware of the country's political situation and cultural mores and behave appropriately so as not to create discord between the school and the host community.



# Appendix #1

## Bomb Threat Report Form

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time \_\_\_\_\_ AM/PM Received by: \_\_\_\_\_

Origin of call: Local \_\_\_\_\_ Long distance \_\_\_\_\_ Phone Booth \_\_\_\_\_  
Mobile \_\_\_\_\_

Exact words of person placing the call:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Questions to ask:

1. When is the bomb going to explode? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Where is the bomb right now? \_\_\_\_\_
3. What kind of bomb is it? \_\_\_\_\_
4. What does it look like? \_\_\_\_\_
5. Why did you place the bomb? \_\_\_\_\_

Identity of caller: Male \_\_\_\_\_ Female \_\_\_\_\_ Adult \_\_\_\_\_ Juvenile \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_ yrs.

### Voice

\_\_\_ Loud  
\_\_\_ High-pitched  
\_\_\_ Raspy  
\_\_\_ Intoxicated  
\_\_\_ Soft  
\_\_\_ Deep  
\_\_\_ Pleasant  
\_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

### Speech

\_\_\_ Fast  
\_\_\_ Distinct  
\_\_\_ Stutter  
\_\_\_ Slurred  
\_\_\_ Slow  
\_\_\_ Distorted  
\_\_\_ Nasal  
\_\_\_ Lisp

### Background Noise

\_\_\_ Office machines  
\_\_\_ Factory machines  
\_\_\_ Animals  
\_\_\_ Airplanes  
\_\_\_ Trains  
\_\_\_ Street traffic  
\_\_\_ Voices-mixed  
\_\_\_ Music  
\_\_\_ Quiet  
\_\_\_ Party  
\_\_\_ Bedlam  
\_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

### Manner

\_\_\_ Calm      \_\_\_ Angry  
\_\_\_ Rational    \_\_\_ Irrational  
\_\_\_ Coherent    \_\_\_ Incoherent  
\_\_\_ Deliberate    \_\_\_ Emotional  
\_\_\_ Righteous    \_\_\_ Laughing

### Language

\_\_\_ Excellent  
\_\_\_ Good  
\_\_\_ Foul  
\_\_\_ Poor  
\_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

### Accent

\_\_\_ Local  
\_\_\_ Not local  
\_\_\_ Foreign  
\_\_\_ Regional  
\_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix #2

### Injury Report Form

Student: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade: \_\_\_\_\_  
Last First

Date/time of injury: \_\_\_\_\_

Location of injury: \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher reporting incident: \_\_\_\_\_

Description of injury:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What first aid treatment or medicine, if any, was given at school?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Were the student's parents contacted? Yes No (If yes, whom? \_\_\_\_\_)

Was medical treatment needed/doctor called? Yes No

Did student finish the school day at school? Yes No

Parent's comments, decision made: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of reporting teacher: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Director's signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**\* This form must be filled out within 24 hours of accident and returned to the Director. \***

## Chapter III – School Closure

Does your school have the following in place?

- Short-term closure plan
- Long-term closure plan
- Hierarchy of authority for important decisions to be made if the director is absent
- Reliable primary sources for checking on local conditions
- Make-up day policy
- Tuition refund policy
- School closure clauses in employment contracts
- Plans of designated responsibilities for an emergency long-term closure of the school
- Safe storage arrangements for important school records

*"The sanctions imposed on Yugoslavia in May 1992 resulted in the closing or reduction in staff of many foreign businesses and embassies here in Belgrade. As a result, our school's enrollment plummeted to nearly half in a matter of months. Worse, three subsequent temporary evacuations of non-essential U.S. Embassy personnel often resulted in classrooms containing only three or four students.*

*'To close or not to close?' was the question no one dared to ask. Our school already had a plan to follow for emergency closure, but it became very clear that we also needed an emergency reduction plan in the event that it was decided to stay open during the Bosnian War. Who would remain in a drastically reduced enrollment situation and who would be let go? In what order and depending on exactly what? For this reason, ISB drew up guidelines for a survival plan including possible staff reduction based on the number of students remaining. Although we did follow our guidelines in the crisis times that followed, we fortunately did not have to reduce our staff. We hope the reduction section will remain unimplemented in our school and at yours, but just in case..."*

*Dr. Nikola Kodzas  
Director and Business Manager  
International School of Belgrade*

*"In 1990, during my first year as head of the American Cooperative School of Tunis, we were faced with the looming Gulf War between the U.S. coalition and Iraq. As the invasion of allied forces neared, we were suddenly informed that all official Americans would be evacuated, and that most American companies would follow suit. This would all take place in the next 72 hours. In a stroke, we were faced with dealing with replacements for dependent spouse teachers, preparing transfer records and transcripts for over half the student body, upgrading security for the school facility and students and teachers, deciding how to deal with the safety of our foreign-hire teachers and their families, and, indeed, considering whether to close the school completely. All of these decisions to be taken within 24-48 hours..."*

*Dr. Rick Spradling  
Director  
American International School of Vienna*

## **Chapter Three - School Closure**

Many parts of the world are in a state of instability. Governments and boundaries are changing dramatically, and age-old hostilities throughout the globe are escalating at an alarming rate. All of this change and potential danger emphasize the need for forethought and preparation in international schools, which may be forced at a moment's notice to close due to revolution, hostility, or even natural calamity. How do you protect the students, faculty, the school, and its records? The time to address these questions and reduce confusion and chaos is before the fact, when there is time and heads are cool.

This chapter has several goals:

- it will provide suggestions for emergency school closure on a short-term basis;
- it will provide a guideline for long-term closure;
- it will establish a generic procedure for reopening after prolonged closure
- it will offer suggestions for survival in a crisis situation where the school remains open.

Remember that each school's location and situation are unique, but common points are shared.

### **Communication**

First and foremost, clear channels of communication must be established so that information can be disseminated in a clear, accurate, and organized fashion. Effective channels of communication will facilitate any emergency situation.

Information concerning school closure must be immediately communicated to staff, faculty, parents, and students, especially if the closure should continue for more than one day. This is most ably done with the help of a telephone tree. The telephone tree is a 'cascade' or 'chain' system of communicating information: names are arranged in

a chain where, for example, three people each call two or three other people, and then these people call other people, and so on. Each person called should call the next person or persons on the list so that everyone is notified of the situation. Every school should establish a telephone tree for its staff and student families and regularly check its validity. In addition to the students' parents' numbers, a regularly updated list of telephone numbers for emergency contacts as well as for relevant businesses and embassies should be maintained.

The school's response to a security situation is very important. School telephone operators must be able to provide parents with clearly understood information concerning any kind of closure. If possible, this information should be in written form to discourage rumors and undue alarm about emergency situations. (Note: Parents should rely primarily on the telephone tree for information in any kind of school emergency. The school switchboard should not be blocked by parents clamoring for information since this will hinder communication with local authorities, embassies, etc.) In the case of a short-term or long-term closure, a reopening date should be announced, if at all possible.

Emergency communications equipment (two-way radios, mobile phones, etc.) should be available in every school. Staff members responsible for operating the emergency communications equipment should have frequent refresher courses in the use and care of all such equipment. All school vehicles should have operational mobile phones.

*(See Chapter 1 for more details on communication.)*

### **Temporary Short-Term Closure and Reopening**

This section refers to both closings during the school day and for the following day or days as the situation merits. Such closures could be the result of the following:

- Civil disturbances
- Immediate threats to the school
- Major sports events causing excessive traffic and/or unsafe conditions

- Inclement weather
- Strikes

In short, any event that threatens the safety of the staff and students would bring about school closure.

### **Who Closes the School on a Short-Term Basis?**

Each school must have a clearly established written procedure to determine exactly which person or persons will make the decision to close the school for one day, delay opening, or hold students past dismissal time. In most cases when a decision must be made immediately, this responsibility falls upon the director. A definite hierarchy must be established to determine who is authorized to close the school in the director's absence.

### **Making the Decision to Close**

The following procedure should be followed if the school is considering closure:

- Verify the situation when it is not obvious or clear by checking reliable primary sources (embassies, local media).
- Once the situation is verified, the director or other designated person will then evaluate the situation and order school to be closed or dismissed early. The criterion for determining whether the school closes or not will be the safety of the students and staff—whether they are at school, or still at home before school begins.

### **Closing the School on a Short-Term Basis**

- The telephone tree will be activated. If parents or drivers are to come and pick up children before school normally lets out (in the case of early dismissal), alternate routes to school may be suggested if the usual ones are unsafe. If school vehicles are used for early dismissal during an emergency school closure, they should be equipped with mobile phones and/or two-way radios if they are not already.

- If the decision is made early in the day, parents will be called immediately so that their children will not be brought to school. Gate guards will be given written instructions as to why the school has been closed in case some drivers/parents leave for school before being informed of the closure.
- In the event of a closure while school is in session, parents will be contacted to either pick up their children or arrange for someone to be at home early when their usual driver drops them off.
- If the school is safe, students may be kept in their classrooms until their parents or authorized drivers pick them up.
- If the school grounds have become unsafe, students will be taken to a nearby, pre-established safe haven to await pick-up. (*See section “Safe Havens” in this chapter and in Chapter Two.*)
- Local security, weather activity, and any other potentially threatening conditions should be closely monitored from primary sources during the closure.
- It should be clearly established beforehand (in the Parent Handbook, via the telephone tree, etc.) that unless the school announces otherwise, classes will resume the next day.

### **Safe Havens**

A safe haven may be an embassy, a student's home, or other building providing an emergency stopping point for school transport, and deemed secure by the school and its advisors.

The following should be considered when choosing a safe haven:

- Its location should be kept confidential and, if possible, changed regularly.
- It should have facilities for supervision, hygiene, and communication.
- Transportation procedures to the safe havens should be updated annually.
- It must contain a reserve of fresh water, food, and medical supplies, which must be checked regularly and replenished or replaced if necessary.

*(See Chapter 2 for more information on safe havens.)*



## **Transport to Safe Havens**

When a decision has been made to move to a safe haven, the following procedure is suggested:

- Explain the reasons for moving to a safe haven.
- If possible, keep children in classrooms until transportation arrives.
- Keep everyone calm.
- Board students on transportation in an orderly manner and appropriately chaperoned.
- Faculty and staff must be sure that all children have been sent to safe haven before leaving the school.

*(See Chapter 2 for more information on safe havens.)*

## **Re-opening of the School After a Short-Term Closure**

- Confirm safe conditions through primary sources.
- Inform the school staff.
- Parents should have been advised beforehand (in the Parent Handbook, via the telephone tree, etc.) that, unless the school has announced otherwise, classes will resume on the following day (or on a specific, previously announced date).

## **Make-Up Days**

Depending on each school's calendar and/or policy, days lost to temporary closure may or may not be made up.

## **Long-Term or Permanent Closure Due to Force Majeure**

"Force majeure" describes an event that cannot be anticipated or controlled. For international schools, it is an emergency situation that would close the school for four or more consecutive weeks, and one that would likewise affect local and foreign-hire staff, faculty, administration, school families, and the overall functioning of the school itself. The situation may be such that decisions must be carried out with the utmost speed and efficiency.

## **Contracts/School Board Policy**

Regardless of how safe, stable and secure a school's location appears to be, it is in every school's interest to stipulate in all staff employment contracts the conditions regarding each party's responsibility to the other in case of force majeure. Some points to consider are the following:

- Emergency clause regarding temporary or permanent evacuation to out-of-country safe havens or to home countries;
- Extension clause after emergency situation ceases to exist;
- Shipping of personal effects;
- Penalties for breach of contract.

School boards must also make provisions for force majeure situations. Some points to consider are the following:

- Tuition refund policy in the event of an emergency closure;
- The names, addresses, telephone and fax numbers, and e-mail addresses of organizations providing services for the safekeeping of school records (*see section "Storage of School Records" in this chapter*).

### **Who Declares Force Majeure?**

As for short-term closure, the first step is verification of the situation at hand. It should be noted, however, that a force majeure situation is usually of such magnitude that it needs little confirmation of its existence. Nevertheless, depending on each school's situation, a force majeure situation may be determined by the American Embassy, school board, or local government.

A force majeure closing could be declared by the following persons or bodies (in descending order):

- The entire school board;
- An appointed executive council of the school board;

- The board president;
- American Embassy administration or the American ambassador;
- The U.S. State Department's Office of Overseas Schools.

### **Force Majeure Action Plan**

The following is an outline of areas of responsibility as well as a guideline of duties to be executed before a school is actually closed. Reliable persons should be designated for each of the following areas of responsibility (if deemed appropriate for the school) at the beginning of each school year; each duty and responsibility should be fully explained to and/or reviewed with the persons involved:

#### The Administration is responsible for the following:

- Communication with the school board, student families, faculty, and staff;
- The overall implementation of the force majeure action plan and follow-through of assigned responsibilities;
- The delegation of responsibilities concerning school security and the shutdown of plant operations.

#### The Business Office is responsible for the following:

- The settlement of local and foreign contracts, and the transfer of bank accounts out of the country (if necessary);
- Arrangements for the summarization of all school bank accounts and deposits, and the updating of signatory authorities, with powers of attorney;
- Arrangements for securing school and personal property by the American Embassy or other pre-designated entity, and reviewing such procedure annually;
- The establishment of inventory lists (with photos if necessary) of school property, which will be updated annually and entered into a computer base, with back-up disks stored at the school and the American Embassy, and perhaps with International School Services or the Office of Overseas Schools.

- The maintenance of school records in a facility outside the country, and the provision of last-minute updates for such records;
- Arrangements for departure transportation.

The Faculty is responsible for the following:

- Communication with the students;
- The organization and distribution of a home-study course for students;
- The storage of instructional supplies and equipment;
- Assistance in faculty departure arrangements and other responsibilities deemed important by the Administration and Business Office.

The Medical/Counseling Staff is responsible for the following:

- The establishment and provision of trauma assistance for students, parents, and staff.

The Administrative Support/Secretarial Staff is responsible for the following:

- The maintenance of an up-to-date list of telephone numbers and addresses for all school staff; the distribution of this list to the emergency team, school board, American Embassy administrative officer, and any other appropriate parties.
- The maintenance of current information on the staff and board members' emergency contact numbers, as well as on the staff's passports and visas.
- The preparation and distribution to all staff and board members of an 'emergency information sheet' with information regarding the following:
  - the school's group health provider;
  - International Schools Services, Inc.;
  - U.S. State Department Office of Overseas Schools;
  - contact numbers of staff and board members;
  - any other information deemed vital.
- The maintenance of school vehicle registration papers.

## **Storage of School Records**

Every effort should be made to secure and store updated records on computer disks. A back-up copy of the school records should be kept in the school itself; another copy should be kept in a secure location such as the American Embassy. Copies of the school records can also be stored with the following organizations:

### International School Services

P.O. Box 5910  
15 Roszel Road  
Princeton, New Jersey 08543  
Telephone: (609) 452-0990  
Fax: (609) 452-2690  
E-mail: [iss@iss.edu](mailto:iss@iss.edu)

### Office of Overseas Schools

Room H328, SA-1  
Department of State  
Washington, D.C. 20522-0132  
Telephone: (202) 261-8200  
Fax: (202) 261-8224  
E-mail: [OverseasSchools@state.gov](mailto:OverseasSchools@state.gov)

The purpose of this storage arrangement is to allow the school to continue business at an evacuation site or from the U.S. while closed either temporarily or permanently. Every attempt should be made by the school to have its computer database organized so that the transfer of records is both expedient and complete. School records should include the following:

- Budget information;
- Salary schedules;
- Payroll obligations;
- Employee contracts and contract leases;
- Vendor obligations;
- Employee assignments;
- Student names, addresses, parent names;
- Report cards and transcripts;
- School historical data;
- Board minutes and policies;
- Administrative procedures;
- Copies of school bulletins and brochures;
- A current yearbook.

The above records should be on deposit no later than September 15th and updated annually. Parents and staff should be notified about this storage arrangement.

If the emergency situation requires a rapid evacuation from the host country, the school's copy of records should be taken out of country with the director or another designated responsible party.

Note: School employees should be reminded to have all their important personal papers up-to-date and ready to take at a moment's notice

### **Settling of Outstanding Local Contracts/Accounts**

If school closure is temporary, there is no need to transfer local bank accounts. If closure will be permanent, then the school should:

- Quickly settle all local employee, vendor, and rental contracts;
- Open U.S. bank accounts so that bank balances in the host country can be safely transferred to the United States;
- Retrieve local money market deposits (accepting penalties) and transfer to a U.S. account;
- Identify need and source of future legal assistance;
- Give the American Embassy power of attorney to transfer local school deposits to the U.S.

Each school should prepare to have an appropriate amount of cash on hand (local and U.S.) to cover closure expenses.

Force majeure closure (if permanent or long-term) may require that all housing leases and vendor contracts be settled. If possible, this may be done by the Business Manager before leaving the country, or by power of attorney through the American Embassy. Copies of all landlord leases and vendor contracts should be stored on disk and kept in a secure place (*see section "Storage of School Records" in this chapter*).

## **Employee Contracts/Tuition Refunds**

Each school must be sure to include clauses mentioning force majeure closing in local and foreign-hire employees' contracts. These clauses should stipulate the school's obligation to the employee in case of force majeure as well as the employee's responsibility to the school.

Conditions of tuition refund should be clearly stated in board policy and in the Parent Handbook.

## **Reopening**

Closing down the school in an efficient manner will greatly facilitate its reopening. Basically, reopening involves the following:

- Verification of the safety and stability of the host country or affected region with primary sources;
- Verification of the safety of the school and grounds;
- Reestablishment of contacts in the local government;
- Verification of the stability of local financial institutions, or the establishment of a safe place to store school money (e.g., at the American Embassy);
- Reestablishment of housing for foreign-hire staff and director;
- Recall of local employees and those who have left the country;
- Examination of employee/director contracts for breach of contract if they do not return;
- Notification of parents of reopening date and status of school.

## **Survival During Crisis**

What happens if there is a major crisis, but for various reasons force majeure is not declared? The following points may serve as a guideline for directors:

- Always bear in mind that the safety of the children and maintaining academic standards are top priorities.
  - Establish an emergency evacuation system.
  - Provide on-campus in-service opportunities for teachers;
  - Allow teachers to attend conferences despite travel hardships.
- Keep the major portion of teachers' contracts and benefits in place to support morale.
- Develop a downsizing plan which takes into account several enrollment scenarios; discuss the ramifications of each scenario with each potentially affected staff member so that decisions can be made in a practical and logical manner.
- Reduce the budget gradually, drawing on operational funds if necessary in order not to make radical changes that would affect the children's education.
- Protect the school's finances:
  - Transfer hard currency to a safe location;
  - Change policy if necessary to collect tuition on an annual basis;
  - Convert hard currency to local currency only when absolutely necessary.

## **Conclusion**

School closure, especially long-term or permanent closure, is a very serious matter that could permanently affect a school's future. If a school is located in a country where political, social, or weather conditions may harbor some threat to the operation of the school and the safety of those associated with the school, it is crucial for the school to have a closure plan in place. The cooperation and support of the staff, coupled with a solid, well thought-out emergency closure procedure, will provide an optimum way of dealing with a situation that is, at best, chaotic.



## Chapter IV – Psychological Readiness

Does your school have the following in place?

- Crisis response policy
- Outside counseling resources
- Response plan for a death in the community
- Response plan for violence in the school and/or community
- Trauma response plan
- Debriefing procedures
- Natural disaster response plan
- Suicide response plan
- Suicide prevention program
- Curricular emergency procedures program for students, staff, and parents

*“Earlier this year, I got a telephone call one Monday morning from my administrative officer: ‘Rick, we’ve had a tragedy occur. The tenth-grade daughter of the new DCM has died in her sleep last night from meningitis.’*

*From that terrible phone call forward, we were faced with panic and hysteria about infectious disease, grief and sorrow felt by the students and parents, and a terrible loss of innocence throughout the school community. For the rest of the week, the phones and computer terminals lit up with communication from the embassy medical unit and the local authorities, for plans for a memorial service, and with the anguish of the peers and family of this beautiful young woman so cruelly ripped from our lives.*

*And now, I have a teacher at death's door, on life support systems at a local hospital. This young teacher is here on a one-year sabbatical leave, and decided at the last minute to go to Mombassa on a ski break. She contracted malaria, and is now in critical condition with lung and heart failure complications. Her chances are slim, but still she hangs on. How we will deal with a second death in the school community, should it occur, is something I don't want to contemplate.”*

*Dr. Rick Spradling  
Director  
American International School of Vienna*

## **Chapter Four – Psychological Readiness**

### **The Psychological Component - Why It Matters and How to Plan For It**

A community can gain strength in the long-term from personal tragedy, *if* the situation is handled properly. If not, it can tear the community apart. In times of crisis, sure direction from professionals coupled with a briefed, compassionate staff will go far to contain the emotional disruption attending a traumatic event such as the death of a student, recovery from a devastating earthquake, or any number of potential crises.

A crisis is defined as a psychological or social condition characterized by instability caused by stress, and endangering the individual in his/her group.

The emotional and psychological trauma that inevitably attends a crisis can have powerful repercussions within the immediate and extended school community. All too often, this area of emergency management is ignored and left unplanned for. The hard truth is that a key component of any effective emergency intervention plan is psychological readiness.

### **Crisis Response Policy**

Schools that have articulated what they stand for in advance of a crisis manage crises best. A typical crisis response policy might have the following objectives:

- To provide for emotional catharsis on a short-term basis in situations that have an emotionally traumatic impact on students (e.g., the death of a student or faculty member).
- To provide a system for supporting faculty who are working with classes of students affected by a traumatic situation, and who are called upon to identify students at risk.
- To facilitate referral for ongoing counseling or therapy in situations that have some potential for becoming "infectious" (e.g., suicide), or in situations where a student's need for counseling or therapy is not addressed adequately in a group meeting format.

- To disseminate accurate information and dispel rumors.
- To provide an ongoing structure for managing potentially escalating anxiety in longer-term high stress situations (e.g., functioning in climates of serious political unrest).
- To facilitate broad-based management of situations that threaten to disrupt the functioning of the school and/or place individuals or groups of students at risk (e.g., a student tests HIV-positive and word gets out in the school; political strife abroad manifests itself in conflicts between students within the school).
- To use students and families as a resource in special situations (e.g., to obtain information about a missing student; to provide support for school families affected by a catastrophe).
- To develop and maintain ongoing educational programs to help students develop anticipatory coping skills.

### **Identification of Resources**

When an emergency strikes, time is critical. Hours matter. And depending on the scope of the emergency situation, a number of special resources will need to be contacted. While many schools may have guidance counselors, special education teachers, and/or health care professionals on staff to call upon for help, additional resources and contacts within the broader school community may be required to assist.

Suggested contacts include the following:

- Health care professionals (including child psychologists) at local hospitals, clinics and schools.
- Professionals within the parent community (they can be contacted through the Parent-School Association).
- Independent psychological counselors.
- Embassy personnel.
- Counseling agencies (clinics, community organizations).

- The counseling staffs of other schools.
- The school's insurance provider.
- Professional associations such as the National Association of School Psychologists.

These contacts should be included in a master resource list created for use by the emergency team.

### **Response Plans**

The following response plans are designed to offer suggestions in assessing the psychological impact and designing countermeasures to assist the school community—students, parents and faculty—in dealing with specific trauma. These plans are "field-tested," and based on real life events.

Note: Underlying these steps is the need for all staff members to be sensitive to the feelings, rights, and confidentiality of all students and staff who may be involved in a crisis situation.

### **Situation: Death in the School Community**

The emotional and psychological trauma associated with the loss of a member of the school community can have a devastating and long-term emotional impact on the school. Psychological readiness—including a specific plan—can dispel confusion and ease the sense of despair by providing a channel and a point of focus.

The following steps may provide guidance in responding to the news of a death within the school community.

### **General Procedures for Handling Death in the Community**

- The administrator and principal take charge and are accessible.
- Additional psychological resources are identified, contacted, and brought on board to assist in teacher preparation, and are made available to students and families in need.

- At the staff meeting, specific information and procedures are discussed. Instructions and support are offered to teachers. A written announcement, drafted by the administrator and/or his/her designee, is given to all teachers, to be read and discussed with students at the beginning of the day.
- Secretaries, clerks, and hall monitors are informed of what is happening (including where the emergency team is located), where crisis centers are being set up, who is excused from school, where groups are meeting, etc.
- The emergency team is available throughout the day to provide support to both students and staff.
- If possible, teachers are provided training and briefing on what to expect, how to handle questions, etc.
- Teachers are encouraged to handle student expressions of grief or loss in their classes through an open discussion of feelings, fears and concerns. Any students who are excessively distraught are referred to the emergency team. All classes are encouraged to return to their normal routine as soon as possible. (A revised schedule allowing for a longer homeroom period may be beneficial for a few days.)
- Crisis centers are set up and locations announced to the faculty and students. Teachers should be aware of students who react or appear extremely upset, and send them, with an escort, to the crisis center.
- Students should be encouraged to return to a normal class schedule as soon as possible. Individual students are allowed time for grieving. Faculty members are to be sensitive and on the lookout for student needs and concerns throughout the day.
- If students are extremely upset, parents will be called.
- A written announcement is given to all teachers regarding visitation and funeral arrangements (time, location, customs). Teachers are sensitized to any culturally specific customs or traditions, for sharing with students. If the funeral is scheduled during a school day, procedures for obtaining excused absences are detailed. Teachers can verbally give this information to students. Staff and students are encouraged to attend the funeral to provide support for the family and bring closure to the incident.

- Teachers should remain on the lookout for students who might show signs of depression related to the death in the days following the death.
- Only with parent approval should students be released from school because of the death.

*(See Chapter 2 for detailed procedures on handling the actual incident.)*

### **Follow-Up**

- An emergency team meeting is held to discuss and assess interventions that have occurred, and to plan the next steps.
- Staff is reminded to monitor the behavior of all students, especially those identified as "high risk."
- Staff is provided with time for reflection and support.
- Crisis centers are closed, or hours restricted, as appropriate.

### **Guidelines for Classroom Discussions Following a Death**

- Give the agreed-upon information/statement at the time decided upon in the faculty meeting. Be complete and accurate; gore and gruesome details should not be discussed.
- Be truthful and direct, but do not dramatize.
- Remind the students to deal with facts, not rumors. Encourage students to treat hearsay skeptically. Teachers may wish to discuss the dangers of false information with their students.
- Observe the verbal and non-verbal reactions of the students.
- Remember that you serve as a role model in how to deal with death/tragedy. Be open and honest about your own feelings and experiences. If you need help, seek it.
- Feel comfortable deferring questions or discussions you feel ill prepared to handle. Refer students to student support groups, and seek help from the emergency team as needed.

- Discuss and offer suggestions for appropriate ways to talk to friends and relatives. This is a good time to review why insensitive humor and inappropriate comments are out of place.
- Allow students to share their feelings and encourage them to be empathetic to the distress of others. If some students are distraught, or express the need to talk further, refer them to the emergency team.

### **Situation: Violence in the School and/or Community**

Living in a community that is experiencing violence, or even anticipating the possibility of violence, can have dramatic repercussions in a school community—particularly if the school community feels it may be the focus (or even the target) of such violence.

### **Preparing for the Possibility of Violence**

There are many ways a school can prepare for the possibility of violence in the host country community, thereby reducing and calming fears.

- Ensure the parent community that the school is aware of the situation and prepared to deal with potential events.
- Establish key information contacts within the community, including embassy contacts.
- Reissue the school's emergency plans (evacuation, violence).
- Convene the emergency team to review plans in place and discuss the situation.
- Review and restate current communication strategies (telephone trees, radio phones, the Internet, etc.) with faculty and parents.
- Establish within the school a centralized communication link that can be used to collect information and dispel rumors; focus on rumor control and the timely dissemination of accurate information.
- Make sure that emergency contact records, etc. are updated for each student.
- Meet with students to review basic evacuation procedures and crisis response plans (where to meet, whom to contact).



The faculty and administration must remain informed, vigilant, and sensitive to the political and cultural events surrounding the school. Student sensitivity can be heightened without raising fears by reminding them of the following common sense precautions. Students should do the following:

- Remember that they are guests in the host country and should act accordingly, both on and off campus.
- Help friends to behave and react sensitively in the host country.
- Have knowledge of political activities and basic issues in the host society.
- Listen carefully and act courteously when in public.
- Exercise extreme caution not to spread rumors.

### **Dealing with Trauma - The Trauma Response**

Any critical incident that is sudden, random, violent, and senseless can shatter a person's sense of safety and well-being and temporarily destroy the ability to function normally. This reaction is called the trauma response. Although everyone will react with different intensities and recover at varying rates (from hours to months), most people will go through some form of the trauma response. Here are some suggestions on how to deal with students:

- Reassure students that their fears and feelings are appropriate and shared.
- Allow for small group discussions to let students "relive" the critical incident and share their feelings.
- Monitor concern about peer reaction (especially at the middle school level).
- Try to reduce tension, anxieties, and possible feelings of guilt.
- Know the typical responses to trauma:
  - sleep and appetite disturbance
  - rebellion at home
  - refusal to do chores or school work
  - poor concentration
  - withdrawal
  - attention-seeking behavior

- physical problems (headaches, bowel problems, psychosomatic complaints)
- loss of interest in social activities
- Monitor student response and refer students to counselors as necessary if any of the following symptoms of psychological distress appear:
  - hallucinating or hearing voices/seeing visions
  - fear that he or she will commit suicide or kill someone else
  - inability to make simple decisions
  - inability to carry out everyday activities
  - self-mutilation
  - excessive alcohol consumption
  - disorientation
  - complaints of significant memory gaps
  - despondence, agitation, or pacing; withdrawal; feelings of unhappiness

### **Debriefing**

In the event of violence in the community, the following debriefing steps can help those involved to respond to trauma and to begin functioning normally again.

- Ask faculty and administration to respond to these three questions:
  - Describe how you first learned of the \_\_\_\_\_.
  - How did you feel then?
  - How do you feel now?

Research shows that using this simple but effective method allows people to function more carefully following trauma. The same question procedure can be used with students when they arrive back at school.

- Each classroom teacher debriefs the students by doing the following:
  - Asking the process questions above and having students jot down their thoughts on index cards.

- Encouraging discussion and sharing.
  - Ensuring confidentiality.
  - Providing as much time as is needed.
  - Making appropriate referrals to counselors when necessary.
- At the end of each day following a specific traumatic event, assemble the staff to discuss the day, share experiences, ask questions, and plan for the following days.

### **Situation: Surviving a Natural Disaster**

Every school facing recovery from a natural disaster—earthquake, hurricane, flooding—will formulate its own unique response to the situation, depending in large part on the extent of the damage and emotional repercussions within the school community.

### **Communication - Sharing Information and Providing Comfort**

During a natural disaster, a school can serve as a vital communication station for members of the school community to stay in touch with friends and family elsewhere.

- Teams can be formed to contact each family within the school. Callers can keep notes on emergency telephone numbers and on where families are going if they plan to leave town.
- Telephone lines can be made available.
- The main reception telephone can be manned around the clock by teachers and staff. Teachers and staff can be trained to direct calls to appropriate places and stop needless phone calls. Information shared should be accurate, consistent, and helpful in stopping rumors.
- Important telephone numbers can be posted on the walls, and a list of updated information posted each day.
- Messages can be communicated regularly, and more than once to make sure they are received and understood. A steady stream of information will provide comfort to families disrupted by a natural disaster; even repeated messages have the positive impact of giving people confidence.

## **The Role of the Internet**

The Internet can serve as a vital link to the outside world. The school can issue daily "progress reports" via the Internet. For example, high school guidance counselors can use the Internet to alert colleges and universities as to what is happening at the school; this would help seniors who are nervous about any possible interruptions in the admissions process already underway.

## **Calming Rumors and Dispelling Anxiety**

Rumors must be addressed quickly. Plans should be put into place to deal with the unlikely event that rumors become fact. One of the most important ways to deal with and combat rumors is to collect them—make it easy to find out what is on people's minds and then disseminate the actual facts.

## **Psychological Counseling**

Several things can be done to provide counseling for teachers, staff, students and their families.

- Recruit outside professionals. They can be made available the first week back in school, and then periodically or as needed after that.
- The school's counselors should be readily available to talk to students about their feelings.
- Rooms can be set aside for students to talk to counselors, friends, or teachers.
- The first day can be spent with students regrouping and writing about what has happened to them. Unique class "time blocks" can be scheduled to allow students to share experiences.
- Resume the normal school schedule as quickly as possible.

## **Relief Efforts - Helping Hands**

A key part in the healing process is the human need to help others. This desire can at times prove to be frustrating since the identification of ways students and staff can help can sometimes take time and effort. Be patient—and available. Hands-on activities may not present themselves immediately, but they eventually will.

Know that money is generally the best way to help, at least initially. As offers of donations come into the school, accept them. In the first hours and days after a major disaster, offers of help will probably be plentiful; however, offers will diminish considerably as time passes. Accept donations immediately—donations given and not used can always be returned. (Money collected can be used to repair damage and replace necessary items.)

### **Human Responses to a Natural Disaster**

After the devastating earthquake in Kobe, Japan, the Canadian Academy there published the following handbooks to help their community recover.

- Parent Handout
- Handbook for Friends, Family and Loved Ones on the Emotional Aftershocks of a Disaster
- Children and Responses to an Earthquake - Teacher Materials

*(See the Appendix in this chapter for copies of these handbooks.)*

### **Situation: Suicide - Intervention and Prevention**

Psychological readiness can also include identification and prevention. Adolescent suicide can be prevented if we recognize at-risk behavior, make at-risk students a priority, and know how to deal with suicidal students. Suicide prevention and crisis intervention programs should include all staff within the school support system, and must include information sessions for parents.

### **Warning Signs and Signals**

There are some specific warning signs and signals to look for in potentially suicidal students. Here are some of the common warning signs that school staff, peers and parents can often identify:

- Prevailing sadness or depression
- Hopelessness
- Boyfriend/girlfriend problems and/or breakups

- Lack of energy
- Changed relationship with peers; i.e., loss of a friend
- Difficulty concentrating
- Loss of interest or pleasure in usual activities
- Atypical acting-out behavior
- Revengeful behavior
- Alcohol or drug abuse
- Sexual promiscuity
- Sudden or increased activity
- Drop in grades or failure in school
- Social isolation
- Disruption in family, such as divorce or separation—especially the loss of same-sex parent support
- Recent death or suicide attempt of a loved one or friend
- Change in eating or sleeping patterns
- Verbal remarks about a sense of worthlessness, failure, death
- Inability to express feeling or emotion
- Preoccupation with death and/or violence
- Psychosomatic illness
- Serious health problems
- Familiarity with weapons
- Hoarding of pills, knives, ropes, etc.
- Attempts to put personal affairs in order
- Previous suicide attempts
- Proneness to accidents
- Self-mutilation or cutting behavior
- History of self-destructive behavior, unnecessary risk-taking
- Disregard for personal appearance
- Out of touch with reality
- Truancy

These warning signs should be made available to any staff members who are in contact with at-risk students.

### **Developing a Prevention Program**

In addition to displaying the above signs, eight out of ten who complete the act of suicide tell someone that they are thinking about it beforehand. Schools must have procedures in place to help students and staff take positive action to prevent suicide. An effective first step is to look at the existing programs already in place, and to develop a customized program.

A suicide prevention program might include these steps:

- Select a program coordinator from within the school system.
- Ask a committee of community members to assess the needs of the program. Identify the unique qualities of the community that may contribute to a suicide problem and turn them into needs statements.
- Develop specific objectives from the needs statements to give the program direction.
- Brainstorm alternative strategies for meeting the objectives.
- Select ethical and feasible strategies from the alternatives identified.
- Periodically review the objectives of the program, and reexamine objectives to make sure they have been met.
- Make needed revisions to the plan.

### **Talking about the Unthinkable**

Perhaps the biggest fear of school administrators, parents, and students is that talking about suicide will lead to copycat behavior. The truth is that schools have little choice but to talk about suicide. If a suicide does occur and the school does not respond, there is a danger in letting the suicide "speak for itself." Steps must be taken to help students talk about what they are feeling lest the risk of additional suicides becomes even greater.

The loss of a loved one through suicide increases the risk of a suicide by a close friend or member of that family by eight times. Neglecting a suicide invites panic and desperation that may in turn lead to irrational decisions.

### **Procedures for Students Identified as At-Risk for Suicide**

(Note: these procedures refer to a non-emergency situation.)

- The staff member who is concerned that a student may be at-risk for suicide should contact a member of the emergency team. (*See section “Warning Signs and Signals” in this chapter.*)
- The emergency team meets to evaluate the seriousness of the situation, gather information, and determine actions to take. The staff member reporting the concern may be included in emergency team decisions, but is not necessarily asked to assume responsibility for the intervention or crisis plan implementation.
- The school counselor or administrator meets with the parents to discuss the student’s suicidal gestures and to determine the seriousness of situation.
- A plan is developed which may include the following:
  - immediate action;
  - referral to an outside agency;
  - assignment of emergency team members to the student for monitoring;
  - communicating to staff that appropriate action has been taken;
  - documentation of the school's actions.

### **Coping with the Emotional After-Effects of Suicide in the School Community**

Some of the critical issues surrounding the suicide of a student include the following:

- Emotional trauma to the student body.
- The possibility of suicide becoming infectious ("suicide clusters").
- The suicide activating or "shaking loose" depression or suicidal ideas in other students.

The general objectives of a sound response are the following:

- To disseminate accurate information and dispel rumors.



- To provide for emotional catharsis on a short-term basis.
- To facilitate referral for ongoing counseling for students whose emotional needs have been brought to the surface by the suicide.
- To prevent the "spread" of suicidal ideation or gestures.

Some situation-specific objectives include the following:

- Intervention is intended to provide students with an opportunity to discharge the emotions triggered by the suicide of a fellow student. The process of coming to terms with an important loss is encouraged by explicit acknowledgment of feelings of loss. The school's acknowledgment of the loss provides support and sanction for the students to more overtly and completely express their feelings and cope with the loss.
- In the wake of a student suicide, know that other students are likely to have experienced suicidal thoughts in the past or may be entertaining such thoughts currently. The suicide may heighten these other students' anxieties about their own psychological process. They may become more unsettled by their own suicidal ideation, or they may develop a morbid preoccupation with suicide. One major objective of intervention is facilitating referral. Let students know that seeking help from someone else when you are feeling depressed is a very mature, adult way of handling difficult or painful emotions. Encourage students to seek out counselors in any way they see fit if they would like to talk about their emotional life.
- Do not impose on students the expectation that they will have stronger feelings for the student who committed suicide than is actually the case. Set up a venue that allows students to come and discuss their feelings if they are interested. Do not use a classroom approach.
- Students or the school may want to take some sort of collective action to express their feelings over the loss of the student. An objective of the intervention is to organize such efforts and see that they are carried to completion.
- The circumstances surrounding the student's suicide may raise other issues, which may require a more broad-based institutional response. For example, if the student who committed suicide was an abuser of drugs/alcohol (statistically, this is

likely to be the case), the school may find itself in a position of making a more comprehensive effort to address substance abuse by students.

- Monitor for delayed reactions.

### **Where to Get Help**

Consult *The Practitioner*, a quarterly publication of the research department of the National Association of Secondary School Principals, 1904 Association Drive, Reston, Virginia 22091-1537; telephone: (703) 860-0200.

### **Curriculum Inclusion**

Psychological readiness can be ensured through preparation and open discussion of the possibility of "bad" things happening in a "good" school.

Curriculum inclusion is a necessary component for students.

Emergency guidelines should be published in student handbooks, and reviewed in class at the beginning of each school year. Follow-up review should occur midyear, or as specific situations warrant.

The objectives of the review should be clear. Students must understand their role in emergency procedures (where to assemble, how to behave, etc.). This can be accomplished through emergency drills, but classroom discussions should also be conducted to underscore the seriousness of the subject, to check for understanding, and to dispel any confusion the students may have.

Curriculum inclusion is a necessary component for parents.

Parents must be informed not only of the school's role in emergency situations, but of their own responsibilities. These responsibilities include the following:

- Maintaining up-to-date emergency notification and telephone tree records with the school.
- Notifying the school of any changes to that information.

Emergency guidelines should be published in the parent handbooks. Parents may need to be reminded of these guidelines when specific emergency situations arise. The first Open House meeting for parents at the school may provide an excellent opportunity to apprise the parents of the school's plans on handling emergency situations, and to solicit feedback from the parent community. The school may also want to consider the inclusion of parent representatives during the creation or review of an emergency guide.

Curriculum inclusion is a necessary component for teachers and staff.

Schools do not expect teachers to be psychological counselors, but because of their special relationships with their students, teachers are the focal point of any emergency plan. Teachers are responsible for the following:

- Disseminating information to the students.
- Helping students through their response to emergency situations.
- Feeding back critical information to the school's emergency team on actions the school needs to take.

Teachers are helpers and guides in emergency situations. It is critical to the success of any emergency plan that teachers be made aware of, instructed in, and asked to help shape the school's emergency routines.

Here are a few specific recommendations on how to inform, train and involve teachers in the school's overall emergency plans:

- Include emergency information in the faculty handbook. Be clear on the teacher's role in emergency situations.
- Provide in-service training for teachers which includes a review of the school's emergency guidelines.
- Arrange for teachers to meet with the school's emergency team for facilitated question and answer sessions.

- Consider the possibility of simulating an emergency situation or drill as a way of reviewing the steps in an emergency scenario with the teaching staff. Be sure to include a debriefing session, and incorporate results of the debriefing in updates to the school's emergency guide.
- Subsequent to any real emergency situation, solicit feedback from teachers and include as changes to the emergency guide.

## **Resources and References**

*Crisis Intervention Handbooks* (Elementary, Middle and High Schools), Mounds View Public Schools.

*Crisis Management in International Schools, SGIS Heads Meeting, 9-27-96*, Lausanne.

*CEESA Survey on Emergency Preparation Responses*, compiled by Gregory A. Hedger, June 1997.

*Security Awareness Overseas, An Overview*, The U.S. Department of State, Overseas Security Advisory Council.

*Policy and Administrative Guidelines*, Singapore American School.

*Coping with Disaster, Lessons from the Kobe Earthquake, January 17,1995*, by Daniel A. Hovde, High School Principal, Canadian Academy, Kobe, Japan.

*School Safety Handbook*, Jakarta International School.

*The Practitioner*, a quarterly publication of the research department of the National Association of Secondary School Principals, Reston, Virginia.

## **Appendix**

*Parent Handbook, Canadian Academy Counseling Office, Kobe, Japan*

As you know, the emotional effects of an earthquake on both you and your child can be tremendous. One of the difficulties experienced by parents during this kind of disaster is that you have not had time to deal with your own reactions when you are called upon to deal with the impact of the situation on your child. The following should help your family get through this crucial time.

## **Emotional Reactions**

Emotional reactions vary in nature and severity from child to child. Often the reactions are determined by their previous experiences, their temperament and personality, and the immediacy of the disaster to their own lives. Regardless of how devastating the earthquake was to your family, some commonalities exist in how children (and adults) feel when their lives are disrupted by a disaster.

## **Loss of Control**

By their very nature, earthquakes are something over which we have no control; if we did, we would stop them from happening. The feeling of loss of control can be overwhelming.

## **Self-Centered Reactions**

Children's immediate reaction to an earthquake often includes a fear for their own safety. They may be intensely worried about what will happen to them, to an extent that you think is unreasonable. However, young children have difficulty putting the needs of others before their own. They need repeated reassurance regarding their own safety and the outcome of the disaster as it relates to them.

## **Stages of Reactions to Loss**

Often reactions to a disaster are similar to reactions to loss or grief. These include denial, anger, depression, bargaining, and acceptance. Not every person experiences all of these feelings, and they don't always occur in just this order. A person may feel angry, then depressed, then angry again. How feelings are expressed will vary with the age of the child. A very young child may express "denial" by refusing to talk about the situation. Older children may just want to be left alone. Some children may also be angry.

## **What to Say to Your Child**

- Knowing what to say is often difficult. When no other words come to mind, a hug and saying, "This is really hard for us," will always work.

- Try to recognize the feelings underlying your child's actions and put it into words. Saying something like, "It makes us mad to think about all of the people and homes that were hurt by this earthquake", or "I can see you are feeling really sad about this," can help.
- Sometimes children may have an overwhelming fear that they are unable to put into words, and you may need to voice it for them. For instance, if your child has a friend who lost a member of his family in the earthquake, you may want to say, "You may be scared that something will happen to me and daddy, too. We are safe and the aftershocks are lessening. We are not going to die in an earthquake."
- Be honest about what has happened and what is continuing to happen. For example, if you don't know for sure when you will move back home, admit this to your child.
- Don't deny the seriousness of the situation. Saying to a child, "Don't cry, everything is okay," does not reflect reality, at least for the immediate future.
- Help your child know what words to use with others. For instance, if the earthquake has resulted in the death of someone your family knows, your child may feel overwhelmed about what to say to friends. You may need to help by suggesting some simple appropriate words.
- Let your child be near you as much as he or she wants.
- Prepare for difficulties with your child at night, regardless of his or her age.
  - If possible, you may want to ensure that your child has his or her special stuffed animal or usual pillow if you have to sleep in a strange place.
  - When returning home, take the time to reestablish usual bedtime routines, such as a bed time story. This will provide a sense of security.
  - For a few nights you may need to sit near your child until he/she falls asleep. Gradually withdraw this support by saying that you will check back in two minutes and continue lengthening this time until your child feels secure again.
  - For a while, a light may need to be left on in or near your child's room.
  - Siblings may want to sleep in the same room until they feel more secure again.
- Plan something practical that your child can do to help with the aftermath of the earthquake. Have your child help in the clean-up, relief efforts, or in some other way. Have your child draw a picture, write a poem, or write in a journal about the

experience; letters to relatives at home would also be welcomed by those who were not with the family when the earthquake struck.

- Plan to spend extra time with your child until the emergency needs diminish.
- Expect that resolving all of the feelings related to this earthquake may take your child (and you) quite a while.

It is normal for a child to bring up a disaster long after it has happened and when you least expect it. You may notice several of the above reactions in your child for a while. That's normal. However, if these reactions continue over numerous weeks, your child probably needs extra assistance in dealing with the disaster.

Make sure your child's reaction is not more severe than that of other children. If you believe the reaction is extreme, talk to one of the Canadian Academy counselors. Extreme reactions include persistent re-experiencing of the earthquake through intense dreams or flashbacks; persistent avoidance of objects associated with the earthquake; diminished interest in usual activities and/or extreme withdrawal; continual crying; or signs of increased arousal such as difficulties sleeping, or disturbances in concentration.

*Handbook For Friends, Family And Loved Ones On The Emotional Aftershocks Of A Disaster, Canadian Academy Counseling Office, Kobe, Japan*

Have any of the following been bothering you since the quake?

- Diarrhea
- Trembling
- Sleeplessness
- Hypervigilance
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Guilt
- Excessive fear
- Anger
- Inability to concentrate

- Nightmares
- Poor decision making
- Painful physical tension
- Flashbacks (vividly and uncontrollably reliving the event)

Read on for some helpful information, even if you answered "no."

You have survived a major traumatic event. Even though the big earthquake may be over, you may now be experiencing or may soon experience some strong emotional or physical reactions. It is very common, in fact quite normal, for people to experience emotional aftershocks when they have passed through a horrible event. Everyone who felt the quake or who has been worried about aftershocks may show some of these symptoms. Residents of Kobe face the most losses and life changes, but they are not the only ones affected.

Sometimes the emotional aftershocks (or stress reactions) appear immediately after the traumatic event. Sometimes they may appear a few hours or a few days later. And in some cases weeks or months may pass before the stress reactions appear. These reactions are normal even if some of them are a bit upsetting.

The signs and symptoms of a stress reaction may last a few days, a few weeks, or a few months, and occasionally longer depending on the severity of your earthquake experience. With understanding and the support of loved ones, the stress reactions usually pass more quickly. Occasionally, the experience is so traumatic and painful that professional assistance from a counselor may be necessary. This does not imply craziness or weakness. It only indicates that the person's earthquake stress is too powerful for them to manage by themselves. Everyone has different reactions at different times—they may fluctuate wildly, too.

Here are some very common signs and signals of a stress reaction:

### **Physical**

- Muscle tremors
- Rapid heart rate



- Headaches
- Vomiting
- Dizziness
- Fainting
- Increased vulnerability to injury and disease
- Diarrhea
- Chest pain (get a medical evaluation immediately)
- Elevated blood pressure
- Visual difficulties
- Grinding of teeth
- Chills
- Sleeplessness
- Nausea
- Difficulty breathing (get a medical evaluation immediately)
- Thirst
- Painful body tension
- Physical weakness
- Profuse sweating
- Sleepiness

### **Cognitive**

- Poor attention
- Short attention span
- Memory problems
- Disturbed thinking
- Increased/decreased awareness of surroundings
- Excessive preoccupation with possible future earthquakes
- Flashbacks (involuntary, intrusive and very vivid "reliving" of the event)
- Blaming
- Nightmares
- Poor decision-making
- Hypervigilance

- Intrusive mental images
- Confusion
- Heightened/lowered alertness
- Poor concentration
- Poor abstract thinking

### **Emotional**

- Grief
- Fear
- Extreme irritability
- Intense anger
- Numbness
- Inappropriate emotional responses
- Anxiety
- Denial
- Uncertainty
- Agitation
- Suspicion and paranoia
- Relief
- Guilt over surviving or being lucky
- Emotional shock
- Depression
- Loss of emotional control
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Emotional shock
- Elation for having survived

### **Behavioral**

- Changes in activity, speech, or sexual functioning
- Withdrawal from friends, family and previous hobbies
- Increased alcohol, tobacco, and other drug consumption

- Startle reflex is intensified
- Obsessive preoccupation with media coverage
- Inability to rest, relax or sit still
- Hyper-alertness
- Pacing
- Antisocial acts
- Fighting with friends or family
- Eating more or less

Remember: some of these symptoms can be very frightening, especially nightmares and flashbacks. Remind yourself and people around you that these are normal reactions to a traumatic event and that they will get better.

### *The Trauma Response*

An earthquake occurs: it is sudden, random, violent, senseless. It affects not only you but friends and family as well. An earthquake can shatter your sense of safety and well-being and temporarily destroy your ability to function normally.

This reaction is called the "trauma response." Although individuals will react with different intensities and recover at varying rates, most people will go through some form of the trauma response, which may be an alternation between two states:

- Numbness: characterized by withdrawal from others, depression or emotional flatness (not feeling much of anything, the feeling of being "lost in a fog"). These signs may be accompanied by problems with concentration.
- Hyper-arousal: characterized by irritability, flashbacks to the earthquake, nervousness, extreme emotions, nightmares, and being easily startled.

It's not uncommon to go back and forth between the two states. You may feel numb for a while, then move on to hyper-arousal, and back again. Some people may ultimately stay in one of the two states. It's also quite common for any traumatic event to rekindle feelings and memories of past events when you felt helpless, shocked, or suffered the loss of someone close to you.

## **Building Walls Around the Pain**

When crisis strikes, the normal human tendency is to try to stop the pain. It's normal to build a "wall" around the incident in an attempt to keep it separate from the rest of your life. The problem with building walls around the pain is that it usually doesn't work. An earthquake or other critical incident causes a traumatic reaction, and refusing to think about it or discuss it won't undo it. Even if the pain can be denied for a while, it will push through later, often in the form of a breakdown in the normal communication between you and the people you care about.

## **Getting Over the Trauma Response**

The trauma response is a temporary reaction to a serious incident. The most important thing to remember is to avoid walling off the pain. Take the time to talk about how this incident affected you. Talk to those people who are close to you or seek out a counselor. Understanding trauma response, and then making a conscious effort to work through it, will ultimately help you overcome the pain.

# **General Appendix**

# **CEESA SURVEY ON EMERGENCY PREPARATION RESPONSES**

In preparing for the creation of this comprehensive guide in April 1997, CEESA mailed a survey to international schools around the world. The purpose of the survey was to solicit information regarding emergency procedures that are already in place and seem to be successful. The survey also requested information about concerns that a school may have, and possible emergency situations that they may be confronted with. A total of 39 schools responded to the survey, with some including manuals that are already in use at their school. The following pages are the compiled results of this survey.

## **Notification**

The first three questions of the survey address the notification process that would presumably take place in the event of an emergency. The first question takes a look at the different ways a school might be initially notified in the event of an emergency situation. The second question is concerned with how students and staff would be notified of an emergency, whether it took place during the school day or outside of school hours. The third question addresses notification of parents should an emergency take place while school is in session.

Question number one reads, *What is the process used for notifying your school of an emergency situation?* The type of response given for this question seemed to be dependent upon the location of the school and how reliable the local media and emergency services are. For schools in remote, or hardship locations, notification of an emergency comes from contacts with an embassy/consulate, either through the Regional Security Officer (RSO), the embassy warden system, or a radio link. Other resources for schools in these locations included parent contact with other embassies, or hired security companies. With all of these contacts, it was emphasized that they be tested periodically due to the importance of being able to depend on them.

Schools in more developed countries had several alternatives available to them for receiving notification of an emergency occurrence. Some schools, especially those with close ties to the U.S. State Department, still cited an embassy connection as being an important source of information. The vast majority of schools in these locations stated that notification came from the media, television or radio, and the local police, or other appropriate authorities depending on what the emergency was.

The second question reads, *How are staff and students made aware of an emergency situation?* This question is actually twofold. On the one hand, the question deals with notification of students and staff if an emergency took place during school hours. Responses took into consideration how quickly a response was needed. If time permitted, it seemed that notification would most often take place through a school meeting, or classroom visits and announcements. If it was imperative that notification take place immediately, then most schools stated they would use the quickest means at their disposal. These methods included use of a PA system, a running messenger, or a system of ringing bells or sirens. One school pointed out that it was probably a good idea to have a portable siren available for use.

The other approach to this question had to do with notification of students and staff should the emergency occur outside of school hours. The method described most often was the use of a telephone tree. In some cases, school staff made all of the calls, usually calling students in their own class and other staff that were assigned to them. A couple of schools mentioned having parents from the PTA, or room parents, who were also active parts of the phone tree. In more developed countries notification included use of the media, a message on the school's home page, and use of the interactive cable TV system.

The final question regarding notification asks, *How are students' families notified of an emergency situation?* This question assumes that the emergency situation has occurred during school hours. Again, responses often took into consideration how pressing the emergency was. If time permitted, most schools stated that they would notify parents by having the secretary call, using the phone tree, requesting help from the PTA, or through use of the media. If it was not urgent, notices could be sent home at the end of the day.

There were several alternatives mentioned that could be utilized in the event that the emergency situation was of an urgent nature. One school said that it states clearly up front in registration papers that notification will only occur if evacuation becomes necessary. Another school mentioned the use of cellular phones. One school also stated that they have contact numbers with people who are outside of the school. In an emergency, parents know what their contact number is, and they can call that number if they can't get through to the school.

### **Preparation & Planning**

The second section of the survey addressed all of the different things that might be involved in making sure that an emergency situation had been planned for. The questions in this section asked about things like school drills, student preparation, use of the community, planned procedures, and other considerations. While there is no doubt that there is much more that could be considered in preparing for an emergency, the questions in the survey provide some insight into what kind of preparation presently exists in international schools.

The first question regarding preparation is the fourth question on the survey. This question reads, *How do you prepare students and faculty for possible emergencies? What types of drills do you use and what procedure is followed for running them?* The vast majority of survey respondents stated that they have emergency drills. These drills include fire and earthquake drills, bus drills, and drills to designated evacuation sites. The regularity of drills differed quite a bit from school to school. Some schools had drills once a quarter. Some schools had several drills early on in the year, tapering off as the year progressed, and some schools had a required number each month, or for the entire year. Students and staff were prepared for these drills, and emergencies in general, through class discussions, films, local speakers, staff and student handbooks, and protected evacuation plans that are posted around the school. Safe house locations were identified when appropriate.

Actual preparation of staff for emergencies differed quite a bit from school to school as well. A few schools stated that all emergency preparation was planned with the



guidance of an outside consultant, like the embassy RSO. One school stated that emergency preparation was an integral part of teacher orientation each year, while another school stated that each department was required to set up a plan to deal with emergencies. Several schools also emphasized the importance of first aid and CPR training, stating that each site had at least one known person with this training.

Emergency preparation continues with the fifth question, which reads, *What information would you need to have immediately at your disposal to effectively deal with an emergency?* This question produced a list of information that administrators feel would be necessary for them to be prepared. While each thing on the list could be quite extensive, the list itself is fairly concise. The list includes the following:

- Some means of determining the seriousness of the situation and what the risk is to the school.
- A list of emergency phone numbers for the police, fire department, medical help, embassy, and other facilities. This list would also include the location of each facility with a corresponding map.
- A map listing emergency equipment like fire hydrants, extinguishers, first aid kits, etc.
- Specified prepared procedures for dealing with different types of emergencies.
- A list of who is in charge in each area of the school in each type of situation, and knowledge of where to contact those people.
- A planned procedure for releasing students. This includes knowledge of evacuation sites, and the address and phone number of each.
- Home phone numbers for all students, as well as any emergency phone numbers needed for notification purposes.

In addition to each of the items on the list, one school stated that it is helpful for each teacher to have an emergency file. This file would clearly state what the teacher's responsibility is in each type of emergency. The file would also include all information that the teacher needed, like student phone numbers and emergency contact numbers.

Question six asks, *In what ways would you utilize the community during an emergency? Do you have established safe houses?* The majority of schools said that they did not directly use the community in planning for emergencies. This is especially true of schools in more developed areas where public facilities are appropriate. In more underdeveloped countries, community participation ranges from informal agreements to assistance with designated safe areas, communications, and consulting for emergency situations. In schools where safe houses are used, they are established within local homes, nearby staff homes, or local churches and other buildings. Some schools have food and water stored in safe houses, and some also make a map available to parents showing the location of safe houses and stating which safe house their child would be sent to.

Question number seven addresses security arrangements made by the school, and reads, *Are there any special considerations necessary to ensure that the campus is safe?* Responses to this question varied, depending upon the country that the school is located in and the perceived threat that exists there. Almost all schools mentioned having guards, especially at night, a procedure for visitors to check in, a security system, and established hours when the school is open. Depending on the school, security precautions also included a controlled entrance point, high walls or fences, easy access to emergency supplies (first aid materials, fire extinguishers, etc.), established security procedures for intruders or other suspicious individuals, secure contact with the embassy, regular security checks, practiced lock-downs, and a means to cut off electricity and/or gas mains if needed.

Question number eight begins to solicit specific information that can be used to establish emergency procedures. This question reads, *What are the written emergency procedures currently in place in your school?* In response to this question, several schools stated that they did not have any procedures established, either because they hadn't been developed, or because there just didn't appear to be a need. Other schools had very clear procedures for different types of emergencies that included such events as playground accidents and classroom first aid, evacuation procedures, fire emergencies, bomb incidents, civil unrest, natural disasters, and others. These procedures included what to expect during each type of emergency, and appropriate responses.

Those schools that did have established emergency procedures differed a bit depending on their specific situation. Generally though, most procedures include the following:

- Directions for phone tree and other forms of communication.
- Forms to be filled out—especially those that help to gather information to be used for notification purposes.
- List of resource people.
- Appropriate administrative and teacher responses.
- Described duties for selected personnel.
- Established safe places.
- Student behavior expectations.
- Information for dealing with the press.
- Specific information for addressing each type of emergency that the school might have to deal with, such as safety positions during an earthquake.
- Clarification on who is in charge during the emergency, and how to get information from that person.
- Repatriation procedures.

Several schools stated that establishing familiarity with emergency procedures is a part of the teacher orientation, or is developed through readings on possible scenarios. It was also stated that emergency procedures should be updated regularly, in many cases annually.

Question nine takes a look at the types of things that could be considered in planning for a medical emergency. This question reads, *What process would be followed in the event of a medical emergency during school hours?* Preparation for a medical emergency that schools described included having health cards on each child that were filed and readily accessible, having standing arrangements with local medical practitioners and ambulance services (in some cases this is the embassy nurse or Peace Corps medical unit), and having specified staff with certification in first aid and CPR. Some schools have a nurse, or other medical person on staff.

In the event of a medical emergency, the school medical staff, or a first aid certified person, would attend to the emergency. If more help were needed, the local medical help, or facilities, would be used. Most schools stated parents would be notified in the event of an emergency; some schools stated that parents would be notified regarding any health-related situation.

One school outlined the following process for dealing with medical situations:

- Contact a medical practitioner.
- Notify parent, or identified alternate person.
- Contact local clinic or medical facility if needed.
- Transport to clinic or hospital if needed.

It can be determined that a school is unsafe anywhere in the world, depending on the situation that occurs. Question ten addresses this by asking, *What type of preparation is in place for the possibility that during the school day the school building becomes unsafe?* Responses to this question again cited extremes from no established procedure, to very clear, concise procedures that addressed every possible evacuation situation. Most procedures included clearly established and defined evacuation routes from the various areas of the school, drills to prepare for evacuation situations that include all school staff and students, expected behavior for students, lists of what a teacher should take during an evacuation (usually grade book, class list, or an emergency folder), a meeting point for further directions that may be a safe point or safe house. These steps were usually followed by a process for getting students home, usually through some sort of check-out system. The evacuation plans of some schools also included the use of other buildings on campus, and home-school plans in the event that the evacuation extends into several days. One school stated that all department heads are assigned cellular phones for use during an emergency.

### **Responsibility**

During an emergency it is important that everybody knows what he/she should be doing, and how he/she can be contributing to making the situation better. Questions eleven and twelve take a look at this aspect of dealing with emergencies. Question

eleven asks about teams that may be established to deal with an emergency, while question twelve asks about specific responsibilities in an emergency.

Number eleven asks, *Do you have an emergency team? If so, please describe the process it follows and how the absence of a team member is handled.* While responses to this question were in many ways dependent on the size of the school, there were still very few schools responding that they have emergency teams. Out of all respondents, nine stated having a team, or teams. Some of the other schools stated that this is handled by the heads of each department, or the office staff. Those schools that had more than one team tended to have those teams divided up according to the type of responsibilities necessary; for example, one school had a team to address safety needs, another for fires, and a third for first aide. If someone on a team was absent, that person was replaced by a specific replacement, the next person in the department, or the next in line on a school flow chart.

Question twelve continued to address responsibility by asking, *How are responsibilities for handling different aspects of an emergency divided up at your school?* The majority of schools stated that responsibility was determined by the chain of command within the school, with the only other responsibilities being those determined through the phone tree. A few schools did divide responsibilities up according to topic areas. Those topics included information/communication, medical supplies, accommodations, attendance/dismissal, media, search & rescue, and activities.

### **Closure and Evacuation**

Questions thirteen through seventeen address a concept that most administrators hope they will never be confronted with, that of school closure and/or evacuation. Perhaps this explains why the survey received the type of responses that it did in this section. More than in any other area of the survey, this section tended to receive responses that included question marks, "unsure", "no plan", and "not planned for". In some school environments, especially those in more developed countries, there really isn't much of a need for things like planned evacuation procedures. For other schools, this is definitely something that needs to be planned for.

There are a number of events that could cause a school to close. Question thirteen considers these events by asking, *What events, natural or manmade, do you foresee as possibly causing a school closure in the country in which you are located?* Responses differed from country to country, and included the following:

Typhoon	Earthquake
Tornado	Snow
Guerrilla attack	Kidnapping
Soccer game	Fire
Bomb incident	War/armed conflict
Volcano	Flood
Civil unrest	Political threats
Epidemics	Government coup

In question fourteen, the survey begins addressing different ways that schools plan for some of the things related to a school closure by asking, *How are school closure days for minor emergencies planned for? Are these days made up?* The majority of the schools that responded to this question stated that school days missed are either not made up, or are added on at the end of the year. Only three schools had extra days built into their school calendar in preparation for the possibility of a school closure. One school stated that it would be determined by the board on a case-by-case basis.

Question number fifteen takes a look at how it would be determined that an evacuation is necessary by asking, *When determining that an evacuation is necessary, what criteria would you use, and what procedures would you follow?* This question received the majority of responses stating that it had not really been planned for. Those schools that did respond stated that an evacuation of any type would be determined by the nature and the degree of the threat to everyone on campus. For example, an evacuation within the campus would be necessary if the campus were safer than any alternative site. In such an event, students would be gathered together and guided to the safest part of the campus, or to the safest building on campus.

An evacuation to a site off campus would occur in the event that the campus is threatened from within, from something like a fire. If this were to happen, students

would be gathered together and escorted to a safe site, eventually moving on to safe houses if prolonged evacuation appeared to be necessary. Some schools stated that they would make use of the school's transportation system to help with this process.

Most schools that might be faced with such an occurrence stated that an evacuation out of the country is something that would be determined after advisement from their embassy, or after a state of alert had been declared within the country. In these cases arrangements were thoroughly planned out, often after consultation with embassy officials.

If an evacuation were to occur, there are several administrative considerations that would have to be taken care of. Question sixteen begins to address these by asking, *In the event of a country evacuation, how is the school's property managed and protected?* Several schools stated that all records and financial information is kept on computer, with at least two back-up disks. One disk is carried out of the country by the head administrator if there were an evacuation. The other disk is carried out by another administrator, a business manager or principal. One school stated that in the event of an evacuation several copies of letterhead stationery, a supply of checks, and the school stamp would also be carried out so that business could continue as needed outside of the country. Other schools mentioned that copies of records are also stored at their respective embassies.

More tangible assets like computers, vehicles, furniture, etc., would obviously be left behind during an evacuation. Most schools stated that these things would be left in the care of local hire staff. A few schools mentioned that arrangements had been made for the school to be cared for by an embassy official, or a local government official or landlord. A few schools have their own hired security arrangements. In situations where the school is owned by a company, the company assumes responsibility for school property.

Question seventeen continues to address school operations during an evacuation by asking, *In the event of a long-term closure, how do you plan to manage financial obli-*

*gations, student fees, and student records?* There were basically two responses to this question. One response was that all school business would simply be put on hold. The other response was that a school office would be established outside the country evacuated, usually in the director's home. From this point all school business could be handled, including financial matters. One school also had plans for a newsletter that would go out to students and parents during the course of the evacuation.

The responses included very few specifics about how financial matters would be handled. Only two schools addressed student fees. In both cases it was stated that all fees are non-refundable, and that this is stated up front in registration papers. Most schools did state that they have salary insurance to take care of staff salaries through the remainder of the school year, and, in some cases, through the remainder of the contract. One school had clearly made arrangements for health coverage during the period of the evacuation, stating the period of time that this would continue for. Another school also stated having an emergency reserve fund to be used in the event of an evacuation.

### **Psychological Considerations**

The psychological and emotional impact of certain events can have considerable impact on both students and staff. As one survey respondent wrote, this is an area that is too often ignored and left unprepared for. This point was fairly evident in the responses that were received for questions eighteen and nineteen, which focus on this area. The vast majority of respondents stated, "not planned for", or something similar, to at least one, if not both of the questions in this section.

The first question in this section, question eighteen, asks, *Following a major closure, what plans do you have for dealing with student feelings and concerns?* Most respondents stated that they would bring in counselors, or that they have a school counselor who would address the situation. One school said that students feel most comfortable talking about concerns with the teaching staff. One school had a fairly concise plan that included having students debrief with a teacher during which students write about their thoughts and feelings. This is followed up later in the day by a class discussion with a "critical incident team".



Question nineteen asks, *What type of events within the school community do you believe would have an emotional impact on the student body and how do you plan for them?* The type of events that it was felt may have an emotional impact included the following:

Fire	Death of a student/staff/parent
Bombing	Kidnapping
Plant failure	Political unrest
Civil disturbance	Vandalism
Coup	Terrorism

There were very few responses stating how the emotional impact of these events would be handled. One school said that they would probably hold a large assembly to discuss it, while another school felt they wouldn't want to do anything that would be considered "public". One school stated that all school staff is trained to handle critical incidents. Finally, a school that has had to deal with a death described having closed for the funeral, provided transportation to the funeral, and held discussions about it in school.

### **The Manual**

The final two questions of the survey address the emergency manual proposed by CEESA. The purpose of these two questions was to solicit responses about the manual itself. Input was requested that would provide some idea as to the type of information school administrators would like to have in an emergency manual, and how they would like that information organized.

Number twenty asks a fairly straightforward question, *What would you want from an emergency manual?* The top response to this question was a request that the manual be clear, easy to read, and use common sense. It was requested that it contain an index for easy reference, and take into consideration the needs of different sized schools. In addition, it was requested that the guide contain answers to questions that

might come up in an emergency, specific steps and adaptable guidelines, forms to use, procedures for proactive planning, plans for communication, and sample scenarios. Finally, it was stated that a guide of this sort should be a sharing of ideas for the many different possible situations that there are to plan for.

The final question of the survey reads, *The comprehensive emergency guide proposed by CEESA would encompass four sections. The first would focus on communication, the second on preparation and drills, the third on school closure, and the fourth would look into psychological preparation. What are your thoughts/reactions regarding these four sections?* An overwhelming number of responses stated that they believed that a guide like this is greatly needed and is an excellent idea. It was stated that the suggested sections would be essential for dealing with a variety of emergencies. There were a few suggestions for additional sections. These sections included "health and safety", "security", and a section on "reopening". It was also suggested that the guide consider how some of these things can be incorporated into the curriculum. Finally, it was also suggested that a guide like this might be too difficult to put together for all schools, and that perhaps it would be more workable to create a guide on how schools can put together their own guide.

## **Conclusion**

The recent survey that was conducted by CEESA regarding a comprehensive guide in emergency preparation appears to be greatly needed. One of the strongest results that came through from this survey was the large number of schools that made it clear that they have little, or no planning completed for the possible emergency situation. At the same time, the majority of the respondents described that there was a need for this type of planning, and a guide to help with this process would be appreciated. Therefore, it would appear that the emergency guide proposed by CEESA would fulfill a need that is being experienced by a large number of international schools.

## **CEESA SURVEY ON EMERGENCY PREPARATION**

The following survey is being conducted by the Central and Eastern European Schools Association (CEESA), with funding from the Overseas Schools Advisory Council (OSAC), as part of the process of developing a comprehensive guide for emergencies that may be confronted by international schools. We would appreciate it if you would respond to each question as completely as possible and return it by April 15.

Thank you.

- 1) What is the process used for notifying your school of an emergency situation?
- 2) How are staff and students made aware of an emergency situation?
- 3) How are students' families notified of an emergency situation?
- 4) How do you prepare students and faculty for possible emergencies? What types of drills do you use and what procedure is followed for running them?
- 5) What information would you need to have immediately at your disposal to effectively deal with an emergency?
- 6) In what ways would you utilize the community during an emergency? Do you have established safe houses? Please describe.
- 7) Are there any special considerations necessary to ensure that the campus is safe?
- 8) What are the written emergency procedures currently in place in your school?
- 9) What process would be followed in the event of a medical emergency during school hours?
- 10) What type of preparation is in place for the possibility that during the school day the school building becomes unsafe?
- 11) Do you have an emergency team? If so, please describe the process it follows and how the absence of a team member is handled.
- 12) How are responsibilities for handling different aspects of an emergency divided up at your school?
- 13) What events, natural or manmade, do you foresee as possibly causing a school closure in the country in which you are located?

- 14) How are school closure days for minor emergencies planned for? Are these days made up?
- 15) When determining that an evacuation is necessary, what criteria would you use, and what procedures would you follow, for each of the following:
  - a) an evacuation within campus?
  - b) an evacuation off campus?
  - c) an evacuation to a safe house?
  - d) a country evacuation?
  - e) some other form of evacuation?
- 16) In the event of a country evacuation, how is the school's property managed and protected?
- 17) In the event of a long-term closure, how do you plan to manage financial obligations, student fees, and student records?
- 18) Following a major closure, what plans do you have for dealing with student feelings and concerns?
- 19) What type of events within the school community do you believe would have an emotional impact on the student body and how do you plan for them?
- 20) What would you want from an emergency manual?
- 21) The comprehensive emergency guide proposed by CEESA would encompass four sections. The first would focus on communication, the second on preparation and drills, the third on school closure, and the fourth would look into psychological preparation. What are your thoughts/reactions regarding these four sections?

## **RESPONDENTS TO CEESA SURVEY**

### School Name, Country

American International School/Dhaka, Bangladesh  
The City International School, Belgium  
Santiago College, Chile  
Colegio Karl C. Parrish, Columbia  
Unknown, Columbia  
The International Community School of Cote d'Ivoire  
Cairo American College, Egypt  
American School of Paris, France  
Marymount School, France  
Munich International School, Germany  
Hong Kong International School, Hong Kong  
Jakarta International School, Indonesia  
Osaka International School, Japan  
St. Maur International School, Japan  
Unknown, Japan  
Unknown, Japan  
RVA/Kijabe, Kenya  
American School of Lesotho, Lesotho  
Majuro Cooperative School, Marshall Islands  
The Ifrane School, Morocco  
Brent School, Philippines  
St. Dominic's International School, Portugal  
International School of Vladivostok, Russia  
Saudi Arabian International School, Saudi Arabia  
The Continental School, Saudi Arabia  
Bontang International School, Singapore  
Beleares International School, Spain  
American International School of Zurich, Switzerland

Ecole D'Humanite, Switzerland

International School of Geneva, Switzerland

The British School in The Netherlands, The Netherlands

American Cooperative School of Tunis, Tunisia

The Koc School, Turkey

French-American International School, U.S.A.

Washington International School, U.S.A.

American International School, Zambia