



# HELPFULHINTS

## FOR SCHOOL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

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### STEPS FOR DEVELOPING A SCHOOL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT PLAN

#### ERCMT Webcast

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

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

The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools strongly encourages schools and school districts to develop emergency management plans within the context of the four phases of emergency management: prevention-mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery. In addition, schools should collaborate closely with police, fire and emergency services personnel and community partners (e.g., public and mental health professionals) who can assist with the development of plans that address a wide range of crises. The following steps will help to guide schools and school districts in developing comprehensive, multi-hazard emergency management plans.



#### Develop Crisis Response Teams

Developing effective emergency management plans requires the expertise and effort of a variety of professionals. Bringing emergency services personnel, community partners and school-based staff together to form a districtwide crisis response team is a key step in developing a strong plan. The district crisis response team is responsible for:

- Initiating, building and maintaining relationships with community partners;
- Conducting safety and security needs assessments;
- Establishing and updating the emergency management plan;
- Assisting in the establishment of individual school-based crisis response teams, to include community partners and school-based personnel such as facilities managers, cafeteria managers, nurses, disability specialists, counselors, teachers and administrators; and
- Developing training activities and conducting emergency exercises to support and improve the plan.

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

## Align Planning and Procedures With Federal, State and Local Efforts

Schools and school districts should coordinate their emergency management activities, plans and resources with federal, state and local agencies to ensure alignment with and compliance to certain policies, initiatives and programs. Schools and school districts should also ensure that their emergency management plans are aligned with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's National Incident Management System (NIMS). The NIMS is the national, unified response plan used by first responders to prepare, coordinate and execute responses to all types of emergencies. Complying with the NIMS allows federal, state, local and private agencies to jointly manage incidents and ensures a smooth and effective response to all emergencies. The NIMS, available at <http://www.fema.gov/emergency/nims/index.shtm>,



offers schools and school districts formalized guidance and support with:

- Implementing well-integrated response procedures and resources during an incident;
- Facilitating a smooth transfer of command and effective activation of additional resources; and
- Providing clear communication to all first responders, school staff, families and the media.

In addition to the NIMS, the following resources will assist schools and school districts in ensuring their emergency management plans are closely aligned with federal preparedness policies:

- **DHS State Homeland Security Contacts**, available at [http://www.dhs.gov/xgovt/editorial\\_0291.shtm](http://www.dhs.gov/xgovt/editorial_0291.shtm), is a list of agencies, by state, that offer resources and support to assist schools in developing their emergency management plans.



- **The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)** and its state counterparts provide valuable guidance and resources to: support collaboration between school districts and community partners; guide preparedness efforts; and effectively manage incidents. The FEMA Web site is accessible at <http://www.fema.gov>, and its list of regional and state emergency management agencies is available at <http://www.fema.gov/about/contact/statedr.shtm>.

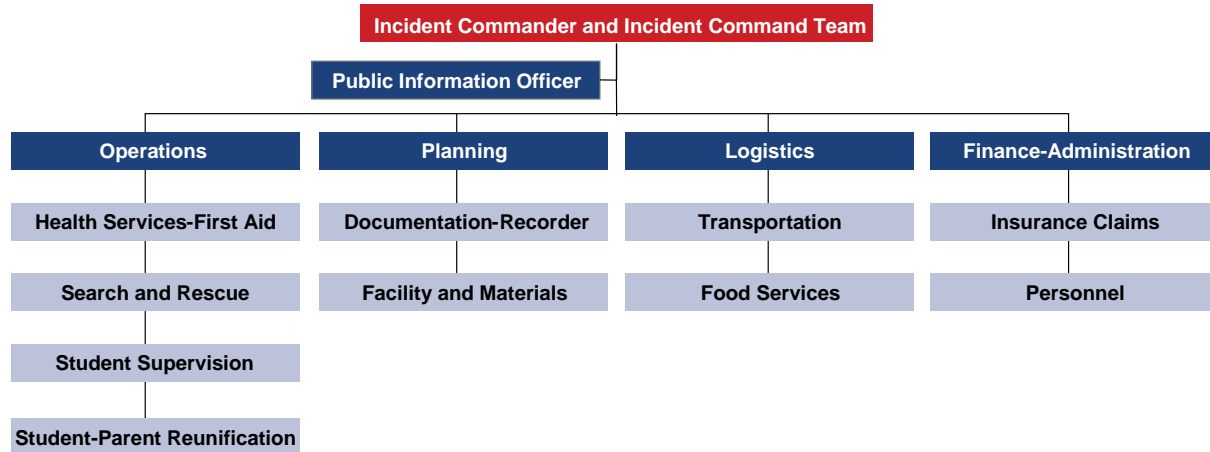
## Conduct Assessments

To strengthen an emergency management plan, crisis response teams should use assessment tools to:

- Identify and prioritize risks and hazards to the school community and take into consideration the possible effects of natural, biological or manmade disasters on the school and local community;

# INCIDENT COMMAND SYSTEM

## Sample School or School District Incident Command System



- Appraise the conditions of school buildings and campuses;
- Assess schools' social and emotional cultures and climates;
- Identify gaps in security policies and procedures;
- Identify and obtain community and staff resources; and
- Identify any specific concerns for individuals with disabilities and special needs.

### Establish and Institutionalize the Incident Command System (ICS)

As part of the emergency management plan development process, schools and school districts should establish an Incident Command System (ICS). The ICS is the response

infrastructure designated under the NIMS to facilitate effective and efficient incident management. The ICS utilizes five functional areas (Command, Operations, Planning, Logistics and Finance-Administration) for managing all incidents, integrating facilities and resource management, establishing equipment standards and creating a common incident management organization. Establishing an ICS involves:

- Identifying key team roles and functions;
- Assessing staff skills;
- Predesignating staff for each ICS area;
- Coordinating with community partners to identify roles and responsibilities;

- Assigning key individual roles and functions; and
- Creating lines of succession (backup) for all key positions.

### Develop Policies and Protocols

A comprehensive, multi-hazard emergency management plan should include district policies for a variety of incidents. Example issues to be addressed in the policies and procedures section of an emergency management plan include:

- Protocols for making decisions about school closures and reopenings;
- Policies for handling student deaths;

- Plans for recording and reporting crisis events and response actions;
- Communication protocols for crisis events;
- Protocols for students, staff and faculty for specific incidents (e.g., bomb threats, shooter on campus, hurricanes, etc.); and
- Continuity of operations plans (COOPs).

At a minimum, school and school district emergency management plans should outline procedures for faculty, staff and students for the following three primary responses:

- **Evacuation:** when it is safer outside the school than it is inside the school.
- **Lockdown:** when there is an immediate threat of violence in or on school grounds.
- **Shelter-in-place:** when students and staff must remain in a school building for extended periods of time during an event such as a chemical spill or terrorist attack.



## Establish Communications Plans

Open lines of communication among crisis response team members, community partners, staff, students, district personnel, parents and the media before, during and after an incident is a critical component of emergency management. Therefore, an effective emergency management plan should incorporate a detailed communications plan for the district and each school. The communications plan must:

- Create, in advance, policies and plans for communicating emergency information with the public;
- Develop procedures for maintaining communication among administrators, staff and students, as well as between community partners, parents and the media;
- Establish alternative communication devices and methods not connected to the main power source in case of power outages, downed phone lines or an overwhelming number of cellular calls; and
- Identify a public information officer (PIO) who will serve as the primary spokesperson to the media and the public during a crisis.



## Create a Student-Parent Reunification Plan

When students and staff have been evacuated to an alternate site, school administrators or the crisis response team will implement a school's student-parent reunification plan for releasing students to their parents and guardians. A strong reunification plan will:

- Designate reunification sites and outline the procedures for releasing students;
- Maintain updated student emergency information that details students' special needs and any medical or custody issues, and incorporate guidelines for storing the information in a secure location accessible to authorized personnel;
- Outline parental notification methods such as the use of calling trees, local media channels or an automated alert system; and

- Disseminate information about the reunification plan throughout the school year using school Web pages, e-mail blasts, letters to parents and guardians and PTA meetings so that when an emergency does occur, parents and guardians will know what is expected of them as well as how and where to access pertinent information.

### Stock Emergency Go-kits and Supplies

Every school should equip and store emergency supplies and “go-kits.” Go-kits include emergency supplies that can be easily accessed and transported in the event of an evacuation or other emergency. Contents of go-kits are generally outlined in a school’s emergency management plan.

Typical go-kits are:

- Stored in backpacks or duffle bags and placed in readily accessible and secure locations;
- Equipped with supplies that address the needs of the specific school, its population, climate, facilities and resources; and
- Include a first-aid kit, emergency procedures and student attendance rosters.

### Provide Training to Faculty and Staff

Emergency management training for school and school district staff helps to ensure that the emergency management plans are well understood. Effective training is:

- Based on the school district’s prioritized needs, risks and vulnerabilities;
- Conducted with community partners;
- Based on a multi-hazard approach to emergency management;
- Scheduled routinely, at least once an academic year;
- Customized and presented to all stakeholders;
- Documented in school and school district records; and
- Provided to all staff, including front office staff, custodial staff, teachers, nurses, cafeteria workers, bus drivers and substitutes.

After the school and school district have conducted their training sessions, revisions to the plan and the training sessions should be made as needed.

### Design and Conduct Functional Emergency Exercises

Functional emergency exercises are simulations of emergency situations and are integral to the development of an effective emergency management plan. Exercises may range from basic orientations and seminars with the district’s crisis response team to tabletop exercises and full-scale communitywide drills that realistically portray a crisis and require the activation of an ICS. When conducted collaboratively with first responders, exercises provide a designated time to:



- Strengthen working relationships among community partners;
- Practice the school and school district’s emergency management plans;
- Identify the areas in need of further development or revision;
- Conduct debriefings;
- Develop after-action reports that detail what happened (i.e., what decisions were made, what worked and what did not, and what plan components need to be revised).

### Publish and Disseminate the Plan

Once the emergency management plan has been developed, it is the school district’s responsibility to disseminate the plan to the appropriate stakeholders. Prior to disseminating the plan, the district may want to consider:

- Determining the amount and type of information needed by each stakeholder;

- Using common language, clear instructions and useful formats such as posters, flipcharts and formal announcements;
- Providing information about the plan in multiple languages as needed; and
- Posting critical procedures prominently throughout the school in classrooms, offices,

faculty meeting rooms, cafeterias, gymnasiums and auditoriums for students, staff and visitors.

A comprehensive, multi-hazard emergency management plan with well-defined and well-executed processes that are based on the four phases of emergency

management—prevention-mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery—will help to ensure the safety of students, faculty and staff, as well as the continuity of school and school districts’ daily business operations during and after crises.

## RESOURCES

### Multi-Hazard Emergency Planning for Schools

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

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

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

The U.S. Department of Justice’s Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) produces a variety of resources that support school and community policing and prevention efforts. As schools and school districts develop, implement and enhance their

emergency management activities, they will work closely with community first responders. As a result of recognizing that community partnerships present unique challenges for every community, COPS has created a free tool kit to address those challenges, and provide community leaders with tips, strategies and models for success.

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



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

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

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