

Protection for Schools and School Districts

School preparedness is strengthened by prevention, protection, mitigation, response, and recovery activities (also known as the five preparedness mission areas—see the text box to the right).¹ This fact sheet describes what protection is, how protection is connected to the other preparedness missions, what protection efforts planning teams may want to consider, and how protection activities can be integrated into planning efforts; additional resources are provided, as well.²

Preparing for emergencies is an ongoing process—even if a school (public or nonpublic) is at a high state of readiness for an emergency, there will still be a need for continued security, safety, and emergency management. Doors will always need to be locked, school bus drivers will always need to be trained, and students will always need to be taught how to respond, for example, to a building fire. These are regular activities with which schools and school districts are very familiar. Schools can build on these existing protective activities to prepare for emergencies—both small and large.

In emergency preparedness, protection follows a similar route to the learning process in schools. That is, rules or boundaries are first established, students receive instruction and practice the concepts they have learned with the resources they need, and they are then tested to ensure that they have mastered those concepts. This process continues with instruction on additional topics. For example, when it comes to preparing for an emergency caused by a tornado, the whole school community is typically told to seek shelter during a tornado warning or at the first sign of a tornado (the rule) and taught how to get into a protective position in a

MISSION AREA DEFINITIONS

- **Prevention** is the action schools and school districts take to prevent a threatened or actual incident from occurring.
- **Protection** is the ongoing actions schools and school districts take to safeguard the school, students, and staff from an emergency event.
- **Mitigation** focuses on actions schools and school districts take to eliminate or reduce the loss of life, injuries, and property damage from an emergency event.
- **Response** is putting the school's and school district's plans into place to effectively respond to an emergency event, and provide for the immediate needs of students and staff.
- **Recovery** is teaming with community partners to restore educational programming; the physical environment; business operations; and social, emotional, and behavioral health.

¹ School refers to all types, including private and public, and all grade levels for the purposes of this fact sheet.

² Fact sheets on the other four areas of *prevention, mitigation, response, and recovery* can be found on the REMS TA Center's Website at <https://rem.ed.gov>.

refuge area or shelter. Resources provided could be shelter-in-place supplies or the refuge area or shelter. For individuals with disabilities or access and functional needs (D/AFN), they may need extra help from caregivers or buddies as they move to the refuge area or shelter. The school community can then be tested regularly with tornado drills. Response teams learn and practice additional concepts, such as their roles in an emergency, and are tested through exercises such as tabletop exercises.

Protection as a Component of Preparedness

The five mission areas of prevention, protection, mitigation, response, and recovery are all connected and directly contribute to preparedness. **Protection** efforts can occur simultaneously

with **prevention** activities, as with all the mission areas. For example, schools in tornado-prone areas can teach personal **protection** actions for before, during, and after a tornado strikes, such as to not approach open chemical containers or downed power lines if the school is impacted by severe weather. These actions can help **prevent** cascading or secondary effects from the tornado, such as additional injuries, and **mitigate** the effects of the event. Training teachers and staff in Psychological First Aid can also help with social, emotional, and behavioral **recovery** after a tornado and other events, which will again help **mitigate** any impact of the incident.



Examples of Protection Activities

Schools and school districts should consider the following protection activities, in collaboration with their community partners, to help make them more resilient to emergencies:

- **Establish rules and policies** for the school. These could cover safety, security, and emergency management, which are all components of preparedness. For example:
 1. Safety: A rule banning weapons on school grounds.
 2. Security: A policy that all visitors must sign in at the office, show identification, and wear a visitor's badge.

Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) Technical Assistance (TA) Center

PROTECTION FACT SHEET

3. Emergency management: A policy that the school will use the Incident Command System (ICS) when responding to an emergency such as a tornado. ICS is a standardized approach to responding to emergencies that is used by all levels of government, schools, and other organizations.
- **Train the whole school community**, including students, teachers, staff, administrators, and parents or guardians. Training can include:
 - Personal protective actions and how to respond to specific emergencies. For example, to prepare for a tornado, those who are able to should sit facing an interior wall, elbows to knees, and with hands over the back of their heads³ or get under a sturdy table and use their arms to protect their head and neck.⁴
 - Roles and responsibilities during an emergency:
 1. Students should know how to respond to an emergency, such as how to evacuate their classroom or take personal protective actions when faced by specific threats or hazards. Depending on the ability of students, they can be trained by community partners as members of a Teen Community Emergency Response Team (Teen CERT) or a Light Search and Rescue Team.
 2. Teachers, staff, and administrators can be trained on their specific roles in the ICS. For those with specialist skills, they can receive ongoing professional development such as how to provide emotional support. Caregivers need to be trained on how to support those with D/AFN in an emergency.
 3. Families also need to be kept informed, and trained where applicable, about how to respond in an emergency. This information could include how to take personal protective actions and then what their role is. For example, they may be told to move to their own refuge area or shelter before a tornado and then to wait for updates from the school.

Schools and school districts should consult with their community partners about what training they can provide to the school community and how often. For example:

- Locally, the emergency management office or fire department may provide Teen CERT training.
- State agencies and departments, such as the education agency and office of emergency management, typically provide or sponsor trainings.
- Nationally, the REMS TA Center provides free in-person trainings by request, downloadable training packages, and virtual trainings. Also, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) provides a variety of free in-person and online

³ National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. *Thunderstorms, Tornadoes, and Lightning ... Nature's Most Violent Storms* (http://rem.s.ed.gov/docs/Tornadoes_and_Thunderstorms.pdf).

⁴ Federal Emergency Management Agency. *Tornadoes* (<https://www.ready.gov/tornadoes>).

Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) Technical Assistance (TA) Center

PROTECTION FACT SHEET

trainings, such as how to implement ICS (see <https://training.fema.gov/programs/emischool/emischool.aspx>).

- **Conduct exercises** to help validate the school's or school district's emergency operations plan (EOP) and emergency procedures, learn where more work or training is needed, and help strengthen relationships between the school and community partners, such as firefighters and police. Exercises can be discussions based or operations based and range from seminars to full-scale exercises. Schools and school districts should also participate in America's PrepareAthon (<https://community.fema.gov/>), which is a nationally instituted, community-based campaign that provides preparedness support for communities. America's PrepareAthon! provides information and resources, such as exercise playbooks for a variety of hazards.

Examples of exercises that can be conducted to prepare for a tornado include drills with the whole school community and tabletop exercises with the school's response team. For more information on exercises, see the Key Resources section below.

- **Acquire and maintain emergency supplies and equipment** in case the school community needs to shelter in place, evacuate, lock down, or take other protective actions. Specific supplies and equipment can be obtained for various groups, including administrators, students and staff, individuals with D/AFN, Teen CERT members, and Light Search and Rescue Teams, and for specific locations such as classrooms and school buses. Supplies should be securely stored in accessible locations, labeled, and maintained. For supplies that have expiration dates (e.g., food, water, batteries), the school should implement steps to ensure that they are regularly inspected and replenished or replaced as needed. All these categories of supplies could help before, during, and after an emergency caused by a tornado.
- **Support the needs of the whole school community**, including those with D/AFN. This support could include activities such as ensuring that individuals with D/AFN have the resources needed to support them in an emergency (e.g., trained caregivers, evacuation equipment) and providing preparedness information to parents and guardians in other languages. In the case of a tornado, students, staff, teachers, and visitors with limited mobility may need additional help moving to a shelter or area of safe refuge and getting into a protective position that best meets their needs.
- **Share information with stakeholders**, such as families, community partners, other schools, and neighboring school districts before, during, and after an emergency. For example, parents and guardians should know what the school's policy is during a tornado event (e.g., students will take shelter in the school and will not be released until they are no longer in possible danger).

- **Provide ongoing physical and virtual safety of the school.** Physical security and safety can be provided through activities such as managing visitors on campus and constructing a severe weather shelter or area of refuge. Virtual security should also be considered, such as firewalls to protect the school's information technology systems and teaching students how to be safe online.

Integrating Protection Efforts Into Emergency Planning

An understanding of the activities that can be conducted in the protection mission area—and all five mission areas—can help generate ideas for what needs to be included in the school district's or school's EOP. To aid in the creation, review, or revision of these EOPs—or a part(s) of the EOP—the *Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans (School Guide)*; http://rem.ed.gov/docs/REMS_K-12_Guide_508.pdf) recommends a six-step planning process that is flexible, adaptable, and customizable to the building level.

Using the example of preparing for a tornado, the planning process could be used as follows:

Step 1: Form a collaborative planning team. The planning team will likely comprise a core planning team, school personnel, community partners, and a school district representative. If the team members identify later that specific protection activities need to be included in the EOP, they can seek input from individuals with expertise or experience in that area. Planning for a tornado would be bolstered through the input of people who are familiar with this type of threat (e.g., local emergency management) and who can recommend where students should seek shelter in the school building(s) during a tornado (e.g., architect or engineer).

Step 2: Understand the situation. Here, the planning team identifies threats and hazards to the school and surrounding community using a variety of assessment tools, assesses those risks, and prioritizes them for inclusion in the EOP. One assessment tool that can help with protection efforts is a Capacity Assessment, which examines the capabilities of the school and community partners. The assessment can help identify what students, teachers, staff, and administrators are trained in and what additional training may be needed to facilitate an effective response to an emergency. The assessment will also identify what resources are available and what additional materials may need to be acquired.

Step 3: Determine goals and objectives and **Step 4: Plan development (identify courses of action).** After assessing the level of risk posed by threats and hazards, the planning team would work to determine goals and objectives to achieve the best outcome for before, during, and after an incident. Then, courses of action would be developed that describe the who, what, when, and how to meet those objectives. For example:

Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) Technical Assistance (TA) Center

PROTECTION FACT SHEET

- A possible *goal* for before a tornado could be the following: Prevent injuries and loss of life.
- One protection-oriented *objective* to meet that goal could be the following: Train the whole school community on where to take shelter.
- Some *courses of action* could be determining where the school's refuge area or shelter would be for severe weather and who would determine this, how students would be taught to move to the refuge area or shelter, and how often tornado drills would take place.

Step 5: Plan preparation, review, and approval. Now the planning team creates a draft of the EOP. Protective actions can be integrated in parts of the EOP that best meet the needs of the school and community partners who play a role in implementing the plan. For example, information on training and exercises would be most appropriate in the Training and Exercises section of the plan; goals, objectives, and courses of action for a tornado would likely be included in a Tornado Annex; and information on meeting the needs of people with D/AFN would be integrated throughout the EOP.

The school's and school district's protection activities and plans should also be coordinated and integrated with those of the local municipality, which in turn will be integrated with those at the state and Federal levels as described in the National Protection Framework (see the Key Resources section below for more information). This integration helps provide more comprehensive protection efforts with the support of local government departments. The local emergency management office can help with this coordination.

The draft EOP is then circulated to those responsible for implementing the plan for their review, edits are made based on feedback, and approval is sought from the school's or school district's appropriate leadership.

Step 6: Plan implementation and maintenance. Here, the plan is maintained via regular reviews and revised when needed. Further, individuals with roles outlined in the annex are trained in their responsibilities and tested through exercises.

Key Resources

Resources available to support protection efforts include:

- **Using the Five Preparedness Missions to Help Ready Your District and School for Emergencies Webinar, REMS TA Center.** In this Webinar, presenters discussed how schools and school districts can take a more comprehensive approach to emergency preparedness by addressing the five mission areas of prevention, protection, mitigation, response, and recovery. Using examples from frequently asked questions about topics

Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) Technical Assistance (TA) Center

PROTECTION FACT SHEET

including threat assessments, earthquake preparedness, and adult sexual misconduct, the presenters discussed strategies to build capacity in critical functions and highlighted key courses of action.

<http://rem.ed.gov/PreparednessMissionsForSchoolEmerg.aspx>

- **National Protection Framework, U.S. Department of Homeland Security.** The National Protection Framework is one of the five National Planning Frameworks and describes how the nation safeguards against acts of terrorism, natural disasters, and other threats or hazards.

https://www.fema.gov/media-library-data/1466017309052-85051ed62fe595d4ad026edf4d85541e/National_Protection_Framework2nd.pdf

- **Plan Implementation and Maintenance Web page, REMS TA Center.** This Web page describes how schools and school districts can train stakeholders in their roles during an emergency and what exercises can be conducted. Related Resources are provided on the left of the page (see the light bulb icon) on training stakeholders; exercising the plan; and reviewing, revising, and maintaining the plan.

<http://rem.ed.gov/K12PPStep06.aspx>

- ***A Training Guide for Administrators and Educators on Addressing Adult Sexual Misconduct in the School Setting*, U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, U.S. Department of Justice Office of the Attorney General, and REMS TA Center.** This guide provides schools and school districts with information to better understand adult sexual misconduct (ASM), develop related policies and procedures, train on ASM awareness and prevention, and recognize the role of social media and technology in ASM.

<https://rem.ed.gov/asmtrainingguide.aspx>

- **Integrating Cybersecurity with Emergency Operations Plans (EOPs) for K-12 Schools Webinar, REMS TA Center.** In this Webinar, an overview of the landscape of cyber threats facing K-12 schools is discussed, as well as U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) resources, programs, and tools to help schools maintain secure networks and prevent cyber-attacks.

<http://rem.ed.gov/IntegratingCybersecurityForK12.aspx>