

# Emergency Response Information for School Facilities

## National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities

Crisis planning includes making preparations for managing school buildings, grounds, occupants, and rescue and recovery personnel during and after a crisis. In [Practical Information on Crisis Planning: A Guide for Schools and Communities](#), the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools states:

*When a crisis occurs, emergency responders will immediately need a great deal of information about your school campus. They will need to know the members of your crisis response team, how the site can be accessed, and the location of utility shutoff valves. Many schools share this information with local police and rescue agencies during the crisis planning process. Some schools give these agencies copies of floor plans that indicate shutoff information. Some school districts compile site information on a CD-ROM and distribute copies to responders; others post this information on a secure Web site that responders can access from laptops at the scene.<sup>1</sup>*

Whether emergency response information is provided on paper or electronically, it should include.<sup>2</sup>

## Building and Site Information

### Neighborhood Map

First responders may need to review the traffic patterns and traffic intersections during a crisis. A neighborhood map should show:

- Streets and intersections near the school
- Primary and secondary entries to the school site
- Location of major utility lines
- Potential locations for an off-campus emergency command post and staging areas
- Emergency neighborhood evacuation routes and potential off-campus evacuation sites.

### Aerial and Ground Photos of the Campus

Aerial and ground-level photos of the campus and the surrounding area are helpful to everyone involved in a school emergency. Satellite photos can be downloaded from the Internet. Your state or local government may be able to provide more detailed aerial photographs. These should be supplemented by ground-level photos of the school site and all of its facilities.

Because of Federal Emergency Management Agency and insurance documentation requirements, extensive photos of damage prior to cleanup and repair are critical. If a FEMA or insurance claim is challenged, a picture is worth a thousand words. (If damage occurs, be sure to take pictures and document it BEFORE recovery efforts begin.)

### Campus Plans

Plans of the school campus should show:

- Site access points
- Significant buildings and site features
- Fire hydrants on and near the school site
- Water, gas, electricity, and communications lines
- Building entrances and exits
- Potential locations for an on-campus emergency command post and staging areas
- Emergency campus evacuation routes and potential on-campus evacuation sites

### Command Post and Staging Areas

A command post location and three distinct staging areas should be designated on or near the school site for:

- A law enforcement and emergency personnel staging area.
- A media staging area, located away from the school and able to accommodate a large number of vehicles.
- A parent staging area, for meeting and retrieving children.

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at the National Institute of Building Sciences [www.ncef.org](http://www.ncef.org)

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Separate staging areas prevent the press from converging on parents and parents from converging on police. Of course, these locations may change, depending upon the circumstances.

### **Alternative Evacuation Routes and Sites**

Identify at least two alternative evacuation routes and evacuation sites (these routes should be posted on classroom doors as well). Be aware that during a shooting spree, the best-laid plans for evacuation may also be under siege. All classrooms at Columbine, for example, had evacuation plans, but with two shooters roaming the school, evacuating the building was itself dangerous. In the Jonesboro, Arkansas, incident, two boys opened fire after students evacuated the building during a false fire alarm. Other factors may require an alteration to the usual evacuation route. In a chemical spill, for instance, the wind direction will determine where to evacuate.

### **School Floor Plans**

Reduced-size floor plans or schematics should show or locate:

- Room names and numbers
- Classroom evacuation routes
- Building entries and exits
- Designated areas of refuge
- Roof access points, if any
- Public address system panel
- Intrusion alarm panel
- Fire alarm panel
- Sprinkler shutoff controls
- Fire hose boxes
- Main power control panel
- Main gas or oil shutoff
- Oil tanks, if any
- Main water shutoff
- Main HVAC shutoff
- Emergency generator
- First aid supplies

Color-coding these components will make it easier to locate them on the floor plans. Ensure the plans are kept current and represent existing, as-built conditions, including all changes not shown on the original drawings.

### **Fire Alarm and Sprinkler Shutoff Procedures**

One of the lessons learned from the 1999 Columbine school shootings was that someone should be able quickly to turn off the fire alarm and sprinkler systems. The loud alarm at Columbine made it difficult for responders to communicate. The fire sprinklers were also activated, covering hallways with water. It took considerable time to locate someone who knew how to shut off the alarm and sprinklers. Make sure administrative staff know the location of the fire alarm and sprinkler controls. Clear instructions should be provided in the crisis plan as well, since it cannot be assumed that the people who know how to turn off the alarm will be available or able to do so. Some schools have installed secure controls outside the school that can shut off both the fire alarm and fire sprinklers.

### **Utility and Television Shutoff Procedures**

Similarly, administrative staff should know how to shut off the main gas, electric, and water lines, with instructions included in the crisis plan. Unless open electric or gas lines pose an immediate threat to life, the decision to shut off these lines should be made by emergency responders.

Administrative staff also should know how to shut down the school's cable or satellite television system in the event of school violence so that perpetrators inside the school cannot view live coverage of the scene and learn the whereabouts of emergency responders and police.<sup>3</sup>

### **First Aid Supplies**

The location of first aid supplies should be shown on the school floor plans.

In the 1998 Jonesboro, Arkansas, shooting, first aid supplies were readily accessible on the school grounds and are credited with saving two children's lives and preventing other individuals from going into shock. The supplies were situated both inside and outside of the school building in anticipation of an earthquake because the school property is located on a fault line. According to school officials, the supplies proved to be lifesaving,

## Human Resources Information

### Emergency Responders

Provide the names and phone numbers of those involved in the emergency response process, such as:

- Incident command system (ICS) personnel
- Public information officer
- First aid director
- Traffic safety director
- Student assembly and release directors
- Grounds and maintenance staff
- Food, water, and supplies coordinator
- Bilingual translator (if appropriate)

Having paper copies of this information is useful so more than one person can make calls.

### School Staff

Survey school staff members to build an inventory of their special skills and training. Useful skills can include prior medical and triage experience, bilingual capability, grief counseling, search and rescue training, hostage negotiations, first aid/CPR certification, and volunteer firefighter or reserve police officer/deputy experience. These skills could prove helpful in a critical incident.

### Outside Assistance

Prepare a list of outside individuals, vendors, and organizations that can assist in an emergency. Local emergency responders can make recommendations about who to add.

Parents can be an excellent source of support and be trained to answer questions, help fellow parents receive information, and maintain calm. Parent volunteers should be prescreened and receive training prior to becoming a member of the emergency response team.

## Building Keys

Provide emergency responders with access to a school master key and, if needed, keys for those rooms not on the master key. Some schools keep the master key in a lockbox outside the school.

## Additional Information

**Disaster Planning, Management & Recovery Guide.** Katrina/Rita Recovery Task Force, Council of Educational Planners International (CEFPI). No date. Contains detailed information about what to do before, during, and after a disaster befalls a school and its community. <http://www.cefpi.org/KatrinaRita/index.html>

<sup>1</sup> Pages 6-27 and 6-28, **Practical Information on Crisis Planning: A Guide for Schools and Communities.** Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools, U.S. Department of Education. February 2007. <http://www.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/emergencyplan/crisisplanning.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Much of this material has been adapted, with gratitude to the State of California, from **Crisis Response Box: A Guide to Help Every School Assemble the Tools and Resources Needed for a Critical Incident Response.** California Attorney General's Crime and Violence Prevention Center and California Department of Education's Safe Schools and Violence Prevention Office. No date. <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/ss/cp/documents/crisisrespbox.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> An article discussing the role of the school maintenance staff in emergency planning and response is **School Safety: Incorporating School Maintenance Staff into School Incident Management Teams** <https://www.llis.dhs.gov/docdetails/details.do?contentID=27064>

Additional material has been adapted, with thanks to the State of Florida, from the **Educational Facilities Disaster & Crisis Management Guidebook**, pages 36-46. Florida Department of Education. January 2, 2007. <http://www.ncef.org/pubs/edfacilities-disaster-management-guidebook-2007.pdf>

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