



Safety Reminder Series

Emergency Planning

Emergency planning is an important part of any organization's risk management efforts. By preparing for emergencies, an organization can reduce the impact of unexpected events and help to ensure less interruption to their services. Plans should be site specific, communicated to staff and volunteers, rehearsed through regular drills and evaluated/updated as needed.

As you develop your plan it is important to consider the different types of emergencies that may affect your program. Some emergencies are geographically specific such as [flooding](#), [storms](#) and [earthquakes](#). Others might be more specific to programs or services, such as kidnapping for child care centers or vehicular accidents when transportation is provided. All organizations have to plan for the risk of some emergency; these might include power outages, [fires](#) or [workplace violence](#).

The following topics will outline some key components in emergency planning for your organization:

Communication:

The first step in every emergency response plan is to identify who is in charge and how things are to be communicated. Organizations should review their chain-of-command and ensure that a single individual is assigned to be the "Go to" person in the event of an emergency at any and all times that services or programs are in operation. In addition to this part of the planning, organizations must determine what methods will be available to communicate during various emergencies. These may include alarms, PA systems, phones, cell phones, radios and the internet.

Written Plan:

Emergency plans should be put in written form to ensure accurate communication to key personnel. [Written plans](#) are also helpful during staff orientation, drills and actual emergencies. The written plan should be clear and concise. It should outline general emergency response behaviors and also address key specific topics such as fire, weather emergencies, [facility lockdowns](#), [lightning safety for pools](#), [crisis management](#) and [business continuity](#). Your organization might find it helpful to assign the task of emergency planning and drills to your safety committee.

Drills:

[Emergency drills](#) are an effective technique for preparing organizations for stressful situations and ensuring that crises are handled effectively. Many organizations have reduced the injuries and chaos that can accompany an emergency because they have been prepared through their drill program. Remember that drills are, in most cases, a training tool for staff; conducted primarily to keep staff prepared for emergencies. Drills should be conducted on a regular basis; including a full evacuation drill at least twice a year. The best times to run an evacuation drill are when the weather permits, but allows enough time to pass where staff will need the training; every October and April is an example of an effective schedule. In some areas, such as child care programs, the program may be required by the local jurisdiction to run evacuation drills every month. Check with licensing authorities to determine which drills must be done and how frequently.

Evaluation:

Your written plan should be updated and evaluated regularly. The plan can be evaluated during a drill by having one person observe the plan in action and document results. These results can then be compared to the written plan to help evaluate any changes that may be needed. During a drill, special attention must be paid to evaluating how all departments interact and how effectively written procedures reflect actual behaviors. Updates should be made to the plan after evaluations and when situational changes are made to the operations of the organization; such as locations, new programs and when critical topics arise.

Resources:

The following links provide sources of information for emergency planning:

[Occupational Safety and Health Administration](#)

[Federal Emergency Management Agency](#)

[National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration](#)

[US Department of Education](#)

[Centers for Disease Control](#)

[Nonprofit Risk Management Center](#)

Additional resources are available in the [Safe-Wise Consulting Online Library](#)