



School Safety and Emergency Management

Monthly Minute: Response Priorities

December 2024

Monthly Minute is a newsletter providing insight and tips on potential threats and hazards brought to you by the Oregon Department of Education.



Schools conduct drills so that students and staff are familiar with emergency procedures before those procedures are necessary. One of the easiest drills to call is an evacuation because it is easy to identify smoke (or other unsafe conditions) and realize it is unsafe. A shelter drill for an earthquake is another that is easy to call because there is no mistaking when the ground is shaking. If a school is notified of unsafe conditions outside of the building—such as a police pursuit or a dangerous accident near school grounds—then we know to call a secure drill to keep that threat or danger outside and to keep students safe inside. Threats that make their way inside our buildings can be more difficult to both identify and respond to if that threat is not active. Such threats could include a

bomb threat, a person trespassing, or even a known person who is suspected of carrying a weapon.

The most important action to take before all others is to act in response to the threat or hazard. A fire requires an evacuation immediately. An earthquake requires everyone to drop, cover and hold on—or evacuate in spaces without adequate cover from falling debris. A threat identified or suspected inside the building requires a lockdown. When danger is present, we must first set the conditions for the safety of everyone in the building. The very next thing to do is to call for help.

In every single scenario listed above, emergency responders should be notified immediately after announcing the appropriate **Standard Response Protocol** (drill) that will make everyone safe in the presence of danger. This is because it will take time to both notify and get fire and police responders moving in the direction of the school. Every minute that we wait to dial 911 could be the difference between someone receiving life saving treatment and someone not making it home to their family that evening. Do not wait to call 911 after a response has been initiated.

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This Month... Conduct an Evacuate drill this month. Review response procedures and have a checklist available for front office staff that covers those priorities.



Conduct an Evacuation Drill this month.

Up Next... January's Monthly Minute will cover medical emergencies and how to prepare and respond when the unexpected results in injury.



Conduct a Secure or a Hold Drill in January.



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Test Your School's Response Procedures

Table-top or scenario-based exercises are invaluable activities that reinforce response priorities making everyone comfortable with the decision making necessary during a real emergency event. For December, conduct a table-top exercise (TTX) that would have the school respond to a severe winter storm.

[Severe winter storm TTX document](#)
[School EOP Resources Page with additional TTXs](#)



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The front office is most often responsible for initiating and coordinating a response. Front office staff should all understand the procedures necessary to respond to any given emergency: announce the appropriate response (lockdown, shelter, evacuate, etc.), then call emergency services (911), then follow through on the other coordinating measures such as notifying district staff, taking accountability and communicating with parents or guardians.

Remember to **use the required drills** to reinforce the need for appropriate response procedures. Simply going through the motions during a scheduled drill could result in indifference or indecision when faced with a real emergency.

Have a checklist in the front office that covers the following:

- Announce the necessary Standard Response Protocol (hold, secure, lockdown, evacuate, or shelter).
- Call 911.
- Continue the necessary response and notify the district office of the event.
- Take accountability of all students and staff.
- Decide on further action necessary to maintain the safety of the school.
- Follow the district **communications plan** and notify parents and guardians on what is happening and what they should do.

Connect with us for assistance on response priorities or other school safety needs.

Contact Information



Scan or click the QR code to visit the School Safety and Emergency Management website with additional school emergency preparedness resources, and to **sign up for the monthly training and technical assistance sessions.**

Additional Resources

Go to our [EOP Resources page](#) for help on this and to find an example communications plan and scenario-based exercises.

[SSEM: Planning for students and staff with access and functional needs.](#)

[Oregon Emergency Management local contacts list.](#)