

# Guidelines for Multihazard Emergency Operations

**Multihazard Emergency Operations for Individuals with Disabilities**

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## Purpose of Multihazard Emergency Operations for Individuals with Disabilities

The guidelines contained in this document will assist in planning for the support required for individuals with disabilities in the event of an emergency, in accordance with Texas Education Code (TEC), Section §37.1086.

### Texas Education Code, Section §37.1086

GUIDELINES FOR MULTHAZARD EMERGENCY OPERATIONS PLAN PROVISIONS FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES OR IMPAIRMENTS.

(a) The agency shall establish guidelines for the provisions in a school district's multihazard emergency operations plan under Section 37.108(f)(4) to ensure the safety of students and district personnel with disabilities or impairments during a disaster or emergency situation, in consultation with:

- (1) the Texas School Safety Center;
- (2) regional education service centers;
- (3) public school educators who work with students with disabilities or impairments; and
- (4) advocacy groups representing individuals with disabilities or impairments.

(b) A school district must follow the guidelines established by the agency under Subsection (a) in adopting implementing the district's multihazard emergency operations plan under Section 37.108.

## General Considerations

To comply with statutes involving individuals with disabilities, school personnel responsible for evacuation and emergency operation plans, notification protocols, shelter identification, emergency medical care, and other emergency response and recovery programs shall:

- have a sound working knowledge of the accessibility and nondiscrimination requirements applicable under federal disability rights laws;
- know the needs of the students and staff attending classes on site;
- involve students with diverse types of disabilities and staff (nurse, LSSP, etc.) and teachers in identifying the communication and transportation needs, accommodations, support systems, equipment, services, and supplies that they will need during an emergency;
- consider emergency accommodations for those with temporary disabilities;
- identify existing resources within the school and local community that meet the needs of students and staff members;
- develop new community partners and resources, as needed;
- inform parents about the efforts to keep their child safe at school;
- identify medical needs and make an appropriate plan;
- determine transportation needs, such as special vans and buses for students;
- identify any necessary tools such as personal response plans, evacuation equipment, or visual aids; and
- include local responders and establish a relationship with individual students with disabilities and their teachers.

In addition to students with disabilities specified under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) law, the school site administrator or designee must identify individuals with a temporary impairment such as a broken leg or hidden impairments such as asthma, panic attacks, significant allergies, or heart conditions. Students with such documented medical conditions may not have an Individualized Education Program (IEP),

504 accommodation or Individualized Health Plan (IHP) in place which would highlight the need for continuing a special medical regime, particularly during a crisis or disaster.

## Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

The IDEA, as amended, is a federal law that ensures special education services to children with eligible disabilities. The IDEA specifies thirteen primary categories under the lead definition of a “child with a disability.” These federal definitions guide how states define who is eligible for a free appropriate public education under special education law. The IDEA requires schools to provide an individualized educational program (IEP) designed to meet the child's unique needs and provide the child with educational benefits.

## Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973

The Office for Civil Rights at the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) has issued regulations to implement Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which apply to institutions receiving federal funds. Section 504, as revised, states in part: “No otherwise qualified individuals with disabilities in the United States . . . shall, solely by reason of the disability, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.”

## Preparedness

Preparedness focuses on what steps need to be taken to facilitate a rapid, coordinated, effective response when an emergency occurs to keep students safe. Partnering with first responders in preparedness strategies is essential and facilitates the safe integration of students with disabilities into emergency procedures.

## Considerations for Preparedness

- Build on current accommodations, modifications, and services.
- Develop a policy and consent form with legal counsel for medical information. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) allows medical information to be given to people responsible for assisting in evacuating individuals with disabilities.
- Incorporate pre-negotiated contracts for services that may be needed in case of an emergency.
- Obtain necessary equipment and supplies, create evacuation maps, and facilities information.
- Inform and train staff about emergency response protocols. Encourage educators to discuss emergency procedures with parents (and those standing in parental relation) as part of IEP meetings or other reviews. For persons in wheelchairs or with other mobility considerations, it should be discussed in advance whether pain or harm will result in moving extremities. If so, suggestions should be considered about best ways to assist if the individual needs to be removed from the wheelchair.
- Learn about the types of hazards that may impact the school (e.g., earthquakes, floods, wildfires) and ensure emergency response procedures address each one.
- Identify a pre-evacuation site which is accessible to students and staff with disabilities.
- Arrange sufficient transportation ahead of time to accommodate the entire staff/student population requiring access needs.
- Develop a schedule of daily activities and classes that identifies where staff/students requiring access needs may be located each period of the day. Plan a primary and secondary evacuation route from each location students and staff members are in during the day.
- Consider classroom location in placement of students with disabilities. Evaluate the disability accessibility of nearby exits and proximity to the school nurse and classroom placements in multi-story buildings.
- Conduct a test of the family notification system to ensure contact information is up to date.

## Other Considerations

### Buddy System

Only staff members can assume the responsibility of assisting students in an evacuation or other emergency situation. Refrain from utilizing students as buddies for students with disabilities during emergency situations to limit students being solely responsible for other students during emergency situations. Additionally, educators in an adjacent classroom can be pre-assigned joint responsibility for both classes if one is busy assisting another student.

### Medication Management

Medicines or medical devices may not be available in emergency shelters or reunification sites. Make alternative arrangements to meet these needs, planning with school nurses or other designated staff who support students during daily medication distribution.

### Access to Communication

Communication access enables effective interaction with people who are deaf, blind, or who have speech, vision, or hearing limitations, which includes making written materials available in alternative formats (e.g., Braille, large print, visuals, disks, and audio cassettes). Consider providing hearing-assistive technologies such as amplified phones, auxiliary aids and other services such as sign language interpreters. An emergency is not the time to learn how to work a rarely used assistive device. Alarm systems for fire, public address systems, severe weather notifications, and lockdown alerts would benefit everyone by incorporating both audible and visual elements. The most effective communication systems are those used regularly. These systems should be tested frequently.

### Go Kits

Classrooms should store disability-related supplies, assistive equipment, and tools required in an emergency for an individual with a disability. Portable preparedness supplies individualized for each student's needs, called "Go Kits," are an integral part of preparedness planning. These kits should include emergency information for the student, as well as medical information which includes contact information and medical requirements. Collaborate with parents and caretakers to plan for Go Kits at the beginning of each school year, making considerations for the student's dietary needs.

### **Mandatory School Drills ([19 TAC, 103.1209](#); [Texas Education Code, Section 37.114](#))**

Drills are a set of procedures which test specific operations or functions, such as evacuating for a fire or lockdowns. All students, including individuals with disabilities, must participate in mandatory school drills. Campus administrators, in collaboration with the school safety and security committee, use drills to evaluate the effectiveness of plans and procedures to meet desired objectives. Lessons learned from these drills should be used to identify gaps and weaknesses as well as update plans and procedures.

## Practices for Certain Impairments

Emergency planning for individuals with disabilities should be individualized. Assess capabilities, limitations, and needs to determine the type of evacuation assistance for each individual in the event of an emergency. Identify the primary and secondary person responsible for assisting students during a drill or emergency. It is essential that parents (or those standing in parental relation), and educators work together to share information and improve safety.

**There is no one-size-fits-all approach. However, there are considerations for certain impairments.**

**Cognitive / Developmental:** Simple diagrams or pictures may provide individuals with cognitive / developmental impairments sufficient information to reach safety. Local education agencies (LEAs) should consider providing more frequent training opportunities for staff to support students in emergency situations. Additionally, LEAs should update evacuation route maps regularly and while ensuring evacuation route maps have directional signs which are easy to follow.

**Hearing:** Consider sign language for communicating during an emergency. If staff are not trained in sign language interpreting, consider using pen and paper, small dry erase boards and markers, or text to speech software. Alerting devices, such as strobe lights and vibrating pagers, can be used to supplement audible alarms for students who are deaf or hard of hearing. Smoke alarms in the classroom and building should be audible and visual. For more information regarding visual fire alarms, consult the [National Deaf Center website](#).

**Mobility:** Consider storing a manual wheelchair, if available, in an easily accessible location. Provide training to staff on transporting individuals in wheelchairs. Consider buildings with multi-level floors and the use of evacuation chairs, providing training to staff on transporting individuals with mobility issues. Considerations should be made for students in self-contained classrooms and those who change chairs each class period.

**Respiratory:** Consider having oxygen and respiratory equipment readily available. Students and staff should practice putting on and removing this equipment as part of an emergency drill.

**Medically Fragile:** Keep medications, authority to administer them, and healthcare plans near the medically fragile student. It is the parent's (or those standing in parental relations) responsibility to maintain medical supplies, notify the school of changes, and provide new doctor's orders. It is the nurse's responsibility to remind the parent to provide medications and update orders when notified. Note that other staff trained to administer medications to students may also assume this responsibility.

**Speech/Auditory:** Determine the best way for the student to communicate with others during an emergency. Consider providing written emergency and evacuation instructions on a card, to be constantly carried and placed in an easy-to-see location. Consider creating a preparedness kit to include essential emergency items specific to speech/auditory needs.

**Visual:** Those with visual impairments may depend on others to lead them to safety during a disaster and may be reluctant to leave familiar surroundings. Consider employing Braille signage or audible directions for students who are blind or have low vision. Emergency backup lighting systems, especially in stairwells and other dark areas, will benefit individuals with limited visual acuity. Consider marking emergency supplies with large print or Braille. Students and staff should know the locations of the nearest telephones and alarm boxes. Consider creating a preparedness kit to include essential emergency items specific to visual needs.

## Response

Response is the immediate reaction to an emergency to save lives and protect property. Proactive efforts in the Preparedness phase will impact the quality of response. Responses will vary depending on the severity and intensity of the event.

### Considerations for Response

1. Assess the situation.
2. Announce the Emergency.
  - a. **To Alert Deaf or Hard of Hearing**— The primary goal is to effectively communicate the nature of the situation and direct them to the appropriate evacuation route. Individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing will most likely be able to follow the same exit route as those who can hear. Communicate with a notepad and pen, with simple, concise speech, or with sign language. Regardless of the method of communication used, convey two key messages:
    - i. There is an emergency; and
    - ii. How to exit
  - b. **To Alert the Blind or Visually Impaired** – Someone who is blind or visually impaired will generally be able to evacuate the same route as sighted students but may need some assistance. Describe the nature of the emergency and offer to guide them to the nearest emergency exit and evacuation assembly area.
  - c. **To Alert Cognitively or Emotionally Impaired** – Individuals with cognitive or emotional impairments will likely be able to use the same evacuation routes as the others. If there is another adult, quickly describe the situation and how to involve him or her in the evacuation. Let the individual know what is happening. Attempt to keep them calm and reassured as you exit.
3. Lockdown and Shelter-in-Place Strategies
  - a. Use Go Kits for immediate necessities;
  - b. Keep away from windows and doors; and
  - c. Attempt to keep them calm
4. Evacuation
  - a. Time permitting, ask the individual how they would like to be assisted;
  - b. Inform emergency personnel of the intended destination and type of assistance needed. If personally unable to contact emergency personnel, ask others to make the notification for assistance;
  - c. Move to the designated evacuation area; and
  - d. Give wheelchair users priority assistance. Evacuate mobility devices with the person if possible (e.g., crutches, wheelchairs, evacuation chairs, etc.)

#### *To Evacuate Persons Using Wheelchairs*

If the person must be moved in their chair, keep the following considerations in mind:

- Powered wheelchairs have very heavy batteries; an evacuation chair for stairs may be needed with the powered chair to be retrieved later;
- If a seatbelt is available, use it. If the person needs to be removed from his/her wheelchair for an evacuation, ask the following as time permits:
  - how they prefer to be moved from the chair;
  - whether pain or harm will result from moving extremities; and
  - if any equipment is needed for immediate safety of life-support.

- When using a powered wheelchair for evacuation:
  - turn off the wheelchair's power before lifting; and
  - turn the wheelchair so it is lowered downstairs backwards (person facing up the stairs), so the occupant cannot slip forward out of the chair and down the stairs;
- 5. Transportation  
Transportation is a necessary component of emergency response plans, requiring planning and attention to detail for individuals with access and functional needs.
  - a. Maintain a transportation resource list by type and availability, including vehicle accessibility and capacity information;
  - b. Develop procedures for the acquisition of additional accessible transportation equipment, wheelchair securement devices, supplies, and resources before a disaster;
  - c. Provide staff training, including a review of procedures for transporting individuals with a variety of assistance needs, as well as the transport of service animals (if part of an accommodation);
  - d. Identify strategies for tracking individuals who are evacuated. Information should include the passenger's name, point of origin, departure time, destination, and arrival time;
  - e. Maintain a master list of drivers by status and availability;
  - f. Provide an accurate number of buses needed for transporting individuals with disabilities.
  - g. Account for all individuals before transportation occurs and after arrival at the reunification destination.
  - h. Transport all passengers to the pre-designated reunification destination by the safest route.
  - i. Use buses. Consider other modes of transportation only if buses are unable to get to the school quickly or are not available.
- 6. Account for all the students, teachers, and staff.
- 7. Meet the medical needs.
- 8. Reassess needs once at the reunification site and request additional support if needed.

## Recovery

The recovery phase is designed to assist students, teachers, staff, and visitors to restore educational operations in school. Recovery is an ongoing process that includes not only the mental, emotional, and physical healing process of students, teachers, and staff, but also restoration of the physical assets of the school (buildings and grounds) to a safe and habitable environment.

### Considerations for Recovery

1. Conduct regular debriefing for staff, responders, and others assisting in recovery;
2. Understand that trauma informed care will need to be provided after an incident for students and staff;
3. Communicate recovery efforts with parents, guardians, and the local community. Ensure that critical information is conveyed in a language appropriate for non-English speaking families;
4. Provide information on community resources to connect families with available services and assistance;
5. Conduct after-action debriefing to capture key lessons learned and recommendations for improvements to the school safety plan, IEPs and 504s;
6. Identify needs and the support necessary to meet them; and
7. Support individuals with disabilities with guidance on acquiring replacement of vital personal equipment (e.g., crutches, hearing aids, wheelchairs, etc.)

## Reassurance

Reassurance is a key to helping individuals through a traumatic event. Support individuals with access and functional needs by providing verbal reassurance and information to help orient them to new surroundings and routines.

### Reassurance Considerations

1. Monitor and help identify resources to ensure physical needs are addressed and medical assistance is provided, as needed;
2. Provide support systems as early as possible;
3. Address concerns about safety. Talk to each student at his or her developmental age, not chronological age. Use language the student understands;
4. Provide information through pictures, if needed, and allow students time to see, hear, talk and draw;
5. Expect some regression in behavior due to trauma after an emergency;
6. Manage unexpected behaviors calmly and consistently; and
7. Minimize the disruption of daily routines. If normal routines are unavoidably altered, create a new one.