

Emergency Readiness Plan:

A **Guide** for the
School Foodservice Operation



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Introduction

Many unforeseen situations can occur in a school foodservice operation that could compromise food safety and the ability to function in a typical fashion. Natural disasters can last for less than 24 hours or may impose hardship to a community for days. Other disruptions may only impose hardships to the foodservice operation and not the entire community. Whether the impact from a disruption is one hour or one month, food safety is a priority.

Possible disruptions

When a disruption occurs in the foodservice operation, an emergency readiness plan can ensure the health and safety of customers and employees. It is impossible to identify all the disruptions that may hinder a foodservice operation. A foodservice emergency readiness plan prepares employees for different types of disruptions.

Some possible disruptions are:

- Blizzards
- Droughts
- Earthquakes
- Floods
- Ice storms
- Hurricanes
- Tornados
- Wildfires
- Rolling blackouts
- Gas or electrical outages
- Kitchen fire
- Refrigerator and freezer breakdown
- Interruption of telephone or computer services
- Water line break
- Weekly food or supply delivery interruption

Other challenges include the lockdown of a facility, labor disputes, a bomb threat, or the unintentional or intentional contamination of food. In these situations, follow the direction of the overriding legal authority and school district officials.

Be prepared

Foodservice professionals can contribute valuable expertise in quantity food preparation, food safety, and equipment usage during a school or community emergency. During a one- or two-hour disruption of electricity, gas, or water, foodservice staff may need to consider changing the menus, modifying the way food is prepared, and alternative measures for hot and cold storage. These same considerations are true for a disruption of a larger scale. In the event of any emergency, foodservice personnel should follow the advice of State and local officials.

When an emergency occurs, assess the magnitude of the disruption and modify the emergency readiness plan accordingly.

Remember, telephones, cell phones, e-mail, and computers may not operate in the event of an emergency. Consider alternate communication measures such as message carriers, drivers, or radio communication such as a walkie-talkie system.

Purpose

An effective emergency readiness plan meets specific needs of the foodservice operation and takes time and thought. Prior preparation, employee training, and practicing activities will minimize the surprise element. A successful emergency readiness plan ensures the safe production, service, and storage of food.

Many school districts have a disaster plan designed to accommodate the needs of the district. The school district's disaster plan may not provide information to assist specific foodservice operational disruptions like equipment failures or a freezer breakdown.

An emergency readiness plan developed specifically for the school foodservice operation will contain many quick answers to problems that may arise in an emergency. The plan should be consistent with the school district's policies and procedures. A policy approved by the school board supporting the foodservice emergency

readiness plan may be part of the district's overall emergency readiness policy. Ideally, the district policy should identify the foodservice director as the authority to maintain control of the foodservice operation. Directors and managers can use this resource to develop an emergency readiness plan to meet the needs of their foodservice operation. This plan may also include or be part of a foodservice biosecurity plan.

Emergency Readiness Plan: Forms for the School Foodservice Operation

Emergency Readiness Plan: Forms for the School Foodservice Operation includes several prototype forms to assist foodservice professionals when writing an emergency readiness plan. The CD-ROM includes the electronic version of these model forms. When writing the emergency readiness plan, modify the model forms accordingly to meet the specific needs of the foodservice operation.

Six Steps to Success

An effective emergency readiness plan provides a foundation for what actions to take in the event of a disruption. When developing the plan, take one step at a time.

A well-conceived plan will help reduce confusion and ensure the health and safety of customers and employees. The six steps of a successful emergency readiness plan include:

- STEP ONE** Determine who will do what in the event of an emergency and develop a contact directory.
- STEP TWO** Identify disruptions that may hinder a foodservice operation and determine alternate procedures.
- STEP THREE** Develop the foodservice emergency readiness plan.
- STEP FOUR** Teach components of the emergency readiness plan to foodservice staff.
- STEP FIVE** Practice emergency readiness drills.
- STEP SIX** Evaluate the emergency readiness plan's effectiveness and update as needed.

STEP ONE

Determine who will do what in the event of an emergency and develop a contact directory.

■ Chain of command

To reduce possible confusion, determine the chain of command early in the development stage. This will provide unified procedures and less uncertainty during the emergency. Identify individuals who have the authority to activate the plan.

Provide a copy of the chain of command to school administrators and school foodservice personnel. Post the chain of command in a common location at each foodservice operation.

■ Contact directory

The emergency readiness plan should identify the names and contact information of the individuals who are responsible for the various aspects of the foodservice. This will provide a coordinated, cohesive approach to manage the emergency. These individuals are the Emergency Response Team coordinators. Select coordinators, who are knowledgeable, can work well with others, and can handle complex situations with ease.

Develop a directory of names and contact information of team coordinators and other support individuals such as principals, health officials, State agency staff, foodservice managers, and vendors. Update the directory periodically. Include a calling system to ensure a method for contacting everyone.

■ Foodservice director's responsibilities

The foodservice director may be required to take on additional responsibilities before, during, and after an emergency. Additional responsibilities of the foodservice director may include:

Before...

- Determine when to implement the foodservice emergency readiness plan.
- Designate the second in command for the foodservice operation.
- Develop alternate operating procedures.
- Plan a three-day menu and ensure foods are available to accommodate the special needs population.
- Communicate the content of the plan, conduct training, and schedule meetings of the response team.
- Identify needs of the foodservice staff.
- Identify community resources.
- Become an active member of the local relief organization and attend specialized training.

During...

- Provide timely updates of the current situation.
- Implement alternate food safety and other standard operation procedures based on the severity of the disruption.
- Approve the purchase of extra supplies (such as disposable dishware, flatware, food supplies, and bottled water) needed in time of emergencies.
- Work with State and local authorities such as health officials, State agencies, and the emergency relief organization.

After...

- Schedule a post-emergency meeting to evaluate the effectiveness of the readiness plan.
- Submit documentation to State agency, vendors, and/or school district administration.
- Write thank you letter(s) and provide certificate of appreciation to staff, volunteers, and community organizations.

■ **Selecting the Emergency Response Team coordinators**

Some Emergency Response Team coordinators may be from outside the foodservice operation. For example, the school nurse, an administrator's assistant, or a parent may be an ideal candidate to assist the foodservice operation in an emergency. Some situations may warrant combining the responsibilities of two or more coordinator positions. Some possible coordinators to consider are:

- Meal Production Coordinator
- Inventory/Records Coordinator
- First Aid Coordinator
- Kitchen Clean-Up Crew Coordinator
- Messages Coordinator
- Public Relations Coordinator
- Donations Coordinator
- Volunteers Coordinator

■ **How many Emergency Response Team coordinators are necessary?**

Since a foodservice emergency readiness plan is specific for a particular foodservice operation, the answer is whatever it takes to meet the needs of the operation. Assess each individual emergency and determine the needs of the foodservice operation.

The number of Emergency Response Team coordinators may vary based on the following:

- Size of the foodservice operation
- Projected number of meals to be served
- Type of disruption
- Foodservice operation designation as a relief shelter

Follow the standard operating procedures of the school district before assigning a coordinator with specific responsibilities. Ask team members to also keep the directory list at home and in a convenient location. Post the list in a common location.

■ **Responsibilities of the Emergency Response Team coordinators**

Even the best plan cannot eliminate all the chaos associated with an unplanned event. Once the Emergency Response Team coordinators are determined, the respective coordinator identifies the individuals who can assist with specific tasks. An emergency readiness plan is specific according to the needs of the foodservice operation, and the coordinators' responsibilities are determined accordingly.

The Emergency Response Team coordinators must maintain constant communication with the foodservice director since the director is responsible for the foodservice operation.

Designate specific responsibilities for each of the Emergency Response Team coordinators. Depending on the needs of the foodservice operation, some foodservice directors may select to include additional Emergency Response Team coordinators or modify the responsibilities. Other foodservice directors select to combine different coordinators' positions. The list below identifies some suggested responsibilities of the response team coordinators.

Meal Production Coordinator

- Ensure safe food preparation and service.
- Monitor refrigeration and freezer temperatures and take corrective actions as needed.
- Determine menu based on inventory, power and water supply, and available personnel.
- Prepare meals and snacks as determined by the standard operating procedure.
- Feed personnel and volunteers as indicated in agreement with the community relief organization.
- Determine appropriate portion sizes. Keep in mind portion sizes for adults are larger than portion sizes for children. Revise production records and standardize recipes accordingly. Record meals and quantity provided to children and adults.

- Complete and maintain accurate production and food safety records.
- Develop food production schedule for preparing meals.
- Designate individual(s) to maintain the availability of beverages such as water, coffee, or tea.

Inventory/Records Coordinator

- Maintain accurate inventory and documentation of USDA commodity and commercial foods.
- Keep foodservice director or designated individual informed of the quantity of food, paper supplies, and chemicals.
- Maintain accurate inventory and documentation of equipment.
- Report and document any loss of food, supplies, and/or equipment.

First Aid Coordinator*

- Stock supplies for first aid kit.
- Provide appropriate first aid.
- Log name of individual injured, witnesses, what caused the injury, and type of medical assistance provided.
- Call for additional medical assistance if appropriate.
- Keep foodservice director or designated individual informed of all injuries.

* Consider a licensed medical professional to serve as the First Aid Coordinator.

Kitchen Clean-Up Crew Coordinator

- Wash and sanitize food contact surfaces.
- Schedule clean-up activities of foodservice operation.
- Train volunteers on proper chemical use and general work safety procedures.
- Coordinate removal of trash after each meal.

Messages Coordinator

- Log all calls and e-mails.
- Communicate messages to appropriate individuals.

Public Relations Coordinator *

- Keep foodservice director or designated individual informed when media or public officials are on the premises.

*Follow school district's operational policies when providing information to media or public officials. Identify a specific individual to communicate with media and public officials before an emergency occurs.

Donations Coordinator

- Accept donations, food, and supplies from reputable sources only. Do not accept home-prepared food items.
- Monitor temperatures and take corrective actions as needed.
- Keep foodservice director or designated individual informed on the amount of donations received and their storage locations.
- Record the name of individual or organization providing donation, phone number, and address. Record the item(s) and quantity donated.
- Determine available storage space for donations in conjunction with the inventory coordinator.
- Write thank you letter(s) and provide individuals with certificate of appreciation following emergency.
- Follow foodservice operation policies.

Volunteers Coordinator

- Keep foodservice director, manager, or designated individual informed on the volunteer status.
- Record the name, phone number, physical address, and emergency contact phone number of all volunteers.
- Schedule volunteers to work as requested by director/coordinator.
- Assign volunteers tasks according to level of skill.
- Write thank you letter(s) and provide individuals with certificate of appreciation following emergency.
- Follow foodservice operation policies.

■ Delegation of tasks

In the event of an emergency, it may be necessary to assign job duties to foodservice staff and community volunteers. This may differ from the regular assigned job duties of the staff. Pre-planning who is responsible for routine tasks provides for a more efficient foodservice operation. Individuals may be required to perform multiple tasks that differ from the usual routine. Normal work hours may also differ.

Remember, individuals may come from other foodservice operations or other schools. They may be volunteers from the community with little or no foodservice experience. Before the emergency, identify tasks that individuals who are not familiar with the foodservice operation can accomplish. Clear and precise directions can help prevent confusion in the event of an emergency. Include in the directions procedures for using equipment properly, mixing sanitizing solutions, and specific procedures for managing contributions.

STEP TWO

Identify disruptions that may hinder a foodservice operation and determine alternate procedures.

■ Food safety concerns

In the event of an emergency, providing safe and healthy foods may appear to be an unrealistic challenge. The key to successfully managing a disruption depends on having accurate information in the emergency readiness plan.

Depending on the type of emergency, some foods and supplies in the operation may not be safe to serve. Follow the recommendations of the local health department and State agencies for proper disposal of food and supplies. Remember to obtain official written notification from the State agency before discarding any USDA commodity foods.

■ Standard operating procedures

Develop a standard operating procedure for short- and long-term interruptions. Consider including input from the response team coordinators and the foodservice employees. Remember, what worked well in one situation may or may not work the next time, so be sure to include a contingency plan as part of the procedure.

■ Menus

Some foodservice operations have a three-day emergency inventory and corresponding emergency menus. Other foodservice operations select to plan menus based on current inventory at the time of the emergency. In either situation, providing safe and nutritious meals are common goals for all school foodservice professionals.

When planning emergency menus consider:

- Foods that are generally available in the foodservice operation
- Ready-to-eat foods

- Portion sizes
- Number of meals that can be prepared from the emergency inventory
- Availability of bottled water
- Availability of food and supplies from community resources
- If a variety of foods will be offered
- If a vegetarian selection will be offered
- Availability of foods to accommodate individuals with special needs
- How much labor is needed for food preparation and cleanup
- Documentation to receive adequate reimbursement
- Shelf stability of goods and supplies

If the foodservice operation provides additional meal service for an extended period, the inventory/records coordinator will need to have an accurate account of the availability of food and supplies. Check with your State agency for provisions regarding reimbursable meals in the event of an emergency. Document all contaminated or damaged foods and supplies. Refer to *Emergency Readiness Plan: Forms for the School Foodservice Operation* for prototypes of emergency inventory and menus.

■ Accommodate the needs of the foodservice employees

Accommodating employees' personal needs to the extent possible is a necessity for an integrated team approach. The most well-organized emergency readiness plan will not guarantee success if employees will not come in to work during an emergency or are unable to handle the pressure. Encourage employees to have a family emergency readiness plan. Determine if employees can be available in the event of a disaster.

■ **Community and State resources**

In the event of an emergency, many resources may be available within the community or from State agencies. A community or State agency may be able to provide all or only a portion of the food and supplies for the foodservice operation. A detailed, updated list containing key contacts, resources, and other pertinent information is an important component of the emergency readiness plan. Include names and contact information and update on a routine basis.

Determine what resources are available and whether or not the resources are contributions or purchased items. Some food vendors may be able to supply or rent a refrigerator truck to keep on the premises. Obtaining this information before a disruption occurs will expedite the process of obtaining food, supplies, and

volunteers when the need arises. Consider contacting local:

- Vendors
- Restaurants
- Health departments
- Hospitals and medical clinics
- Beverage companies and distributors
- Schools, colleges, and universities
- Sororities and fraternities
- Factories and businesses
- Relief organizations
- National Guard
- Emergency services officials (e.g., fire, police, city emergency managers)

Contact those individuals identified in the emergency readiness plan as community resources before requesting assistance from State agencies or national relief organizations.

STEP THREE

Develop the foodservice emergency readiness plan.

Once the Emergency Response Team coordinators are determined and possible disruptions identified, writing the actual foodservice emergency readiness plan is not difficult. Design a flexible emergency readiness plan with a contingency or back-up plan for different potential disruptions. If the impact of an actual emergency is less than anticipated in the plan, the emergency readiness plan can be scaled down accordingly.

A well-designed plan

Remember, a well-designed emergency readiness plan will:

- Identify the chain of command and how to contact all team members and resources.
- Indicate who will implement the emergency readiness plan.
- Identify the Emergency Response Team coordinator(s) and specific responsibilities.
- Provide standard operating procedures.
- Identify individuals who will have keys to the foodservice operation. If equipment such as freezers and refrigerators are locked, identify where the keys or combinations to the locks are located.
- Provide written descriptions for routine tasks.
- Identify community and State resources.
- Accommodate the needs of the employees to the extent possible.
- Accommodate individuals who have special needs.
- Include emergency menus and a three-day inventory of food and supplies.
- Include routine updates, staff training, and evaluation of the plan.

STEP FOUR

Teach components of the emergency readiness plan to foodservice staff.

A crucial element of successful emergency management is teaching the individuals involved the components of the plan. Discuss the plan step by step and identify responsibilities or tasks. Ask the employees for feedback on the plan and welcome any suggestions. Identify where the written plan will

be located in the foodservice operation. Provide a written copy of the plan to the Emergency Response Team and foodservice staff. Consider placing a copy of the plan in all district school foodservice operations and back-up copies in the district office.

Practice emergency readiness drills.

Conducting mock emergency drills that address several of the disruptions identified in the emergency readiness plan can enhance employees' response during an actual emergency. Have coordinators practice using the assigned calling system to contact other individuals on the team.

Under the direction of the foodservice director, consider practicing mock drills without the assistance of one or two of the Emergency Response Team coordinators. Revise the plan accordingly. Designate a specific day or time and pretend phone service is unavailable.

Evaluate the emergency readiness plan's effectiveness and update as needed.

Think of the foodservice emergency readiness plan as an ongoing process and consider possible improvements. Update the content of the plan on a routine basis to ensure accurate information is available. Provide foodservice staff and volunteers with a thank you letter and a certificate of appreciation.

- Was the amount of food and water adequate?
- Were additional food and supplies available from the community resources?
- Were volunteers helpful?
- How can the preexisting plan be improved?

Evaluating the emergency readiness plan

After an emergency, evaluate the emergency readiness plan. To evaluate the effectiveness of the plan consider asking the following questions:

- Was the Emergency Response Team available when contacted?
- Did the contact directory contain current names and phone numbers?
- Did foodservice employees know what to do during the emergency?
- What measures were taken to ensure food safety?

Emergencies come without warning. A written emergency readiness plan ensures the safe production, service, and storage of food. It is impossible to predict the intensity of an emergency. A well-conceived plan provides the foundation for what actions to take in the event of a disruption. Prior preparation, employee training, and practicing activities will minimize the surprise element. Update and evaluate the plan on a routine basis. Write the school foodservice emergency readiness plan today, for tomorrow may be too late.

Serving as a Designated Relief Shelter

A school foodservice operation may become a designated relief shelter in the event of a major emergency. The emergency may be in the local vicinity of the school or miles away. During a hurricane as well as other emergencies, individuals may need to relocate to a safer area. The school foodservice facility may become a designated relief shelter. In many cases, assistance from a relief organization may not occur for 72 hours. This may add additional responsibility to the school foodservice operation.

■ **School district administration responsibilities**

The school board or administration should determine a pre-established school policy. The board-approved policy should identify the designated individual(s) who have the authority to declare a disaster. To help eliminate possible confusion, the policy should reinforce the foodservice director as the authority to maintain control of the foodservice operation. Allowing untrained individuals to manage the foodservice operation may lead to the unaccountability of food, supplies, and equipment. It may also lead to serious injury.

■ **School district and community relief organization agreement**

Determine, under the advisement of legal counsel, a contractual agreement with the emergency relief organization(s). The contractual agreement should be in place before the foodservice operation is designated as a relief shelter.

When developing a contractual agreement with a relief organization, consider the following.

- Clarify what specific operating costs the relief organization will reimburse the foodservice operation.

- Determine the reimbursement rate provided by the relief organization to the school district.
- Establish documents necessary for reimbursement by the relief organization.
- Clarify the length of time for document retention by the school district.
- Establish when the district can expect reimbursement for the expenses accrued during the emergency.
- Identify available supplies, who will pay for storage of additional supplies, and who will unload the delivery trucks of supplies provided by the relief organization or local vendors.
- Determine who is responsible for repair charges due to damaged equipment.
- Clarify who will pay for the additional foodservice staff labor and at what hourly wage. Determine who will pay work-related injuries sustained by employees and volunteers. Is additional insurance required?

■ **Questions from the community relief organization to the school district**

In the event the school foodservice is designated as a shelter, a contact person from the community relief organization will begin to assess the situation and determine the needs of the community. It is important to have as much information available as possible regarding the foodservice operation. Some sample questions personnel from a relief organization may ask are found in *Emergency Readiness Plan: Forms for the School Foodservice Operation*.

The aftermath of some natural disasters may impose added responsibilities to school foodservice operations for weeks or months. In many cases, relief supplies may not be provided for 72 hours and the district may need to contact local or state resources.

Foodservice professionals contribute expertise in quantity food preparation and help ensure food safety measures in a disaster situation. Consider attending meetings offered by local relief organizations, or becoming a volunteer for local relief organizations. Becoming a recognized partner with the community relief organization will allow the foodservice staff to better meet the needs of the community.

World Wide Web Resources

American Red Cross. *In the news.*

<http://www.redcross.org/>

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). *Disasters and emergencies.*

<http://www.fema.gov/library/dizandemer.shtm>

Food and Nutrition Information Center (FNIC). *Emergency preparedness.*

<http://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/etext/000080.html>

Busy Cooks. *Preparing an emergency food supply short term food storage.*

<http://busycooks.about.com/library/pubdom/blemergfood.htm>

Food and Nutrition Information Center (FNIC). *Resources for food safety and storage in emergency situations.*

<http://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/emerg.html>

United States Army General Dennis J. Reimer Training and Doctrine Digital library. *Emergency Management Plan (Emergency Mass Feeding)*

<http://www.adtdl.army.mil/cgi-bin/atdl.dll/tc/8-502/ch19.pdf>

United States Department of Homeland Security. *Ready.gov.*

<http://www.ready.gov>

Web sites were accurate on March 24, 2003.

