



FACT SHEET

While safety planning is familiar to schools, disaster planning is relatively new to the education sector. Local educational agencies (LEAs) play an integral role in protecting the health and safety of their district's staff, students, and their families. Many states now require specific disaster preparedness activities in their school systems. Such contingency planning may be seen as an extension of the risk assessment procedure.

High profile accidents and disasters have demonstrated the common sense of disaster planning. Conversely, such incidents have also highlighted the often tragic cost of failing to identify hazards, including their potential for sudden, dramatic escalation if the arrangements to control and contain them prove to be inadequate.

Having an effective plan is the key to reducing the management of a disaster to a system for making decisions at a time when decision-making is difficult. Effective plans to mitigate the consequences of a disaster will derive from an "all-hazards" approach (the "what-ifs" and worst-case scenarios, both on-site and off-site) and joint consultation with all of those likely to be involved.

Building a strong relationship with the local health department is critical for developing a meaningful plan. Planning in advance and anticipating as many health and safety variables as possible will allow schools to ensure that the decisions made on the day of a crisis are made quickly and effectively, and that those decisions will be correct and automatic responses arising out of the time spent on pre-planning for disaster. When an incident does occur, schools should be better able to contain and control events.

Additional information on plan development can be found at:

- Tips for School Officials
<http://www.dsf.health.state.pa.us/health/cwp/view.asp?a=333&q=233824>
- Tips for Schools and Daycare Centers
<http://www.dsf.health.state.pa.us/health/cwp/view.asp?a=333&q=233831>
- Tips for Infants, Toddlers, Children and Latchkey Kids
<http://www.dsf.health.state.pa.us/health/cwp/view.asp?a=171&q=233768>