

SCHOOL-AGE DISASTER SCENARIO (Section 1)

Background: The scenario takes place in a large urban school district in the Northeast. Each school in the district has a Crisis Management Team consisting of a Principal, Assistant Principal, Office Manager, Social Worker, Nurse, 2 Teachers, Head Custodian and the School Psychologist as a consultant. An all-hazards Crisis Management Plan has been developed which is based on the NIMS (National Incident Management System). NIMS is a comprehensive, national approach to incident management and is designed to improve coordination and cooperation among all response organizations. It is flexible and can be used for all types and sizes of incidents. There are 6 components of NIMS:

1. Command and Management specifies the chain of command during an emergency and who is responsible for what, using an Incident Command System (ICS) with an incident commander in overall charge. This is a hierarchical chain that must be followed so there is no duplication of efforts which wastes time, energy and resources. Sometimes, in large crises, a unified command may be implemented where responders from different agencies (i.e. police, fire, emergency services, etc.) that have different responsibilities may jointly lead the emergency command.
2. Preparedness utilizes Emergency Operations Planning. It involves assessing the risk of an emergency occurring, determining how to handle the risk and training responders to handle the situation resulting from the risk. From this, the Crisis Management Plan is developed.
3. Resource management dictates how personnel, facilities, and major equipment and supply items will be assigned by the Incident Command System for use during the incident. This allows the incident commander to know where everything is during the emergency and where resources can be obtained if the need arises.
4. Communications and information management tells how communications to responders and the public will be handled using standardized words and equipment. It also identifies a public information officer (PIO) who will be the spokesperson during the incident.
5. Supporting technologies use computers and other technology to assist in handling the incident. They must be universally compatible across the country and any equipment that is used must be able to be used by everyone without special adaptations.
6. Ongoing management and maintenance involves meeting changing needs as they may occur during an incident as well as demobilizing the resources after the incident. This requires constant re-evaluation to make sure the situation is being handled in the most effective and efficient way.

The Crisis Management Plan is intended to:

- Protect and sustain life
- Reduce emotional trauma
- Assist emotional recovery
- Minimize injury/damage
- Resolve the crisis as effectively and efficiently as possible

SCHOOL-AGE DISASTER SCENARIO (Section 1 continued)

- 11:45 AM It is a windy Tuesday in March. An inner-city elementary school is located within a mile of a chemical plant. Three of the school's classes are outside at recess. Three classes are in the cafeteria for lunch. Four classes are in the auditorium watching a science program. Two classes are due back from a local field trip momentarily. All other students are in their classrooms.
- 12 Noon A 911 call is made from the chemical plant reporting a fire. The local fire station and police respond.
- 12:10PM Fire trucks arrive at the chemical plant. Smoke is billowing out into the environment. The fire chief orders that all access roads around the plant be cordoned off. The police begin to divert traffic from the area. The school is downwind from the chemical plant.
- 12:15 PM The fire chief talks to the plant's facility director to determine what chemicals are in the building and, if known, what caused the fire.
- 12:30 PM The fire chief learns that some of the chemicals in the plant can produce toxic fumes. The fire chief sends police to notify you to shelter-in-place your 600 student inner-city elementary school.

What do you need to know to proceed based on the school's Crisis Management Team and the school's Crisis Management Plan?

Need to know:

(page A)

1. Crisis Management Plan

- A. Is there a plan developed for this type of incident; where is it
- B. Chain of command; who is incident commander; who is backup if unavailable
- C. How will the Crisis Management Team be convened – who will cover the classes of the teachers who are on the team
- D. Communication to notify classrooms, transportation, administration, school board (network of key communicators); is there a specific code for this type of crisis
- E. Spokesperson for media (Principal gives data to District's public information officer)
- F. Specific procedures for sheltering-in-place (need to know layout of building; shut off all outside air ventilators/windows/doors; all students are to come inside and return to their classrooms; if have trailers on campus, all students are to go into the main school building)
- G. Who will ensure that every child is located during sheltering-in-place
- H. What staff or children need special assistance
- I. Arrange how/when children will be dismissed & released to parent/approved adult; inform extended day programs (use emergency closing procedures)
- J. What is the chemical pollutant and what effect can it have on people exposed to it

SCHOOL-AGE DISASTER SCENARIO (Section 2)

- 12:40PM The Principal becomes the Incident Commander. The following steps are taken initially:
- The Crisis Management Team is requested to assemble via the code “CMT meeting in 5 minutes in the conference room.”
 - Teacher aides are assigned to cover the classrooms of the teachers on the Crisis Management Team.
 - The Superintendent is notified of the event.
 - The School Public Information Office is notified of the event.
 - Police and emergency medical personnel are sent to the school by the Fire Chief.
- 12:45 PM A Crisis Management Plan has been developed for a school to shelter-in-place, so the Principal utilizes this plan. The plan is named “Code S” and the announcement that “Code S” is taking place is announced over the intercom.
- All outside air ventilators are shut by the Head Custodian and all windows and outside doors are closed on the recommendation of the Crisis Management Team.
 - All students are requested to return to their classrooms via the loudspeakers inside and outside of the school.
 - All students in out-lying buildings are notified via intercom to come into the main building.
 - Members of the Crisis Management Team assign Teacher Aides to check all bathrooms and other non-classroom areas for students and escort them to their classrooms.
 - The busses on the fieldtrip are notified via cell phone to divert to an off-site evacuation shelter that the school has a letter of agreement with.
 - The Fire Chief is informed of the off-site evacuation shelter and he deems the shelter safe.
 - The Superintendent notifies the shelter via telephone of the conveyance of the students and the shelter begins preparations for their arrival and the provision of lunch.
 - The Transportation Director is notified via telephone of the transference of the field trip students to the off-site shelter.
 - All inquiries about the situation are referred to the School Public Information Officer.
 - Police officers do not allow any visitors to enter or leave the building once the Crisis Management Plan is activated.
- 1:00 PM Students in the out-lying buildings are gathered in the auditorium.
- Parents attempt to call the school to find out if their children are safe; some parents attempt to come to the school but are unable to get to it because the roads have been closed to traffic and pedestrians.

SCHOOL-AGE DISASTER SCENARIO (Section 2 - continued)

Some students who had been outside for recess begin vomiting and have difficulty breathing. The school nurse calls 911 to request EMS (Emergency Medical Services) assistance.

The school nurse conferences with the Hazmat Team to find out what chemical is causing the toxic fumes and how it will affect those who are exposed to it. She finds out that the chemical is Sodium Hypochlorite Solution. This substance is used in bleach and various disinfectants. It normally is safe, but it will emit toxic fumes of chlorine when heated to evaporation and decomposition. If the fumes are inhaled, they may cause irritation to the respiratory tract, especially to those who have impaired respiratory function, such as children with asthma, or heart disorders. If any of the chemical is swallowed, nausea and vomiting may occur. It may also cause irritation to the skin and eyes. Usually the symptoms occur fairly quickly and, if treated appropriately, will have no long-term health effects. The nurse receives a Material Safety Data Sheet - "Sodium Hypochlorite Solution" from the Hazmat Team which gives more information about the substance.

1:05 PM The school nurse shares the information from the Hazmat Team with the Emergency medical personnel. They begin to give the ill students first aid on-site. This is observed by other students. A rumor starts that every one else will get sick too. This causes some students to get frightened and upset. They start crying, which results in other students beginning to panic.

1. How will information about the chemical released be developed and disseminated to the staff?
2. How will the staff minimize trauma exposure to the student body from the ill children?
3. What suggestions should the teachers be given by the social worker to calm the students and prevent them from panicking?
4. What should the parents be told by the school personnel about the situation?
5. What should be included in the information disseminated to the students, teachers, and parents by the school nurse and/or the social worker? Write a fact sheet to be handed out based on the information in the MSDS (Material Safety Data Sheet).

Remedial Actions to Take:

(page B)

1. Disseminate information
 - A. Nurse informs principal of information obtained relating to chemical
 - B. Principal, nurse, social worker and office manager write up fact sheet
 - C. Fact sheet reviewed & approved/amended by school public information officer
 - D. Fact sheet given to all staff members
 - E. Staff members inform students, based on their level of understanding

2. Minimize trauma exposure
 - A. Ill children are isolated from general population
 - B. Staff member stays with ill children & accompanies them to the hospital if necessary
 - C. Students are moved away from any areas where children were sick
 - D. Staff remains with students at all times

3. Calm agitated children
 - A. Social worker gives written suggestions to teachers on how to calm the children
 - B. Teachers reassure students that all safety measures are being taken to protect them from getting sick
 - C. Staff reassures all students that the school is safe and their parents will know where and how they are to pick them up
 - D. Staff maintains a calm demeanor (not raising voices, body language congruent with messages being given, etc.)
 - E. Teachers engage children in quiet activities until parents arrive to take them home
 - F. Highly agitated/emotional students are isolated from general population – social worker stays with them for reassurance/calming/psychological first aid

4. Refer all calls to the School Public Information Officer
 - A. Make recording for telephone instructing all parents to call the Public Information Officer
 - B. Keep one line open for contact with emergency responders

5. Fact Sheet should contain:
 - A. Brief overview of exposure to chemical – chemical plant fire which caused a release of toxic fumes into the air
 - B. Name of chemical – Sodium Hypochlorite Solution
 - C. Potential health effects – coughing, sore throat, nausea, vomiting, eye irritation, aggravation of pre-existing heart and respiratory conditions
 - D. What to do if exposed child exhibits signs/symptoms – seek medical help; bring this fact sheet with you to the doctor/hospital
 - E. Long term consequences of the exposure – none known
 - F. Contact person in school district to answer further questions – public information officer

SCHOOL-AGE DISASTER SCENARIO (Section 3)

- 2:00 PM Fifteen children are transported to local hospitals due to reactions to the chemical. Teacher Aides accompany the children. The school nurse has been briefed on the condition of the children by the emergency responders.
- 2:05 PM The school nurse notifies the principal of the hospitalizations; the principal then notifies the superintendent and the public information officer.
- 2:10 PM The public information officer notifies the parents of these children that they became ill and where they have been hospitalized.
- 3:00 PM The fire chief reports to the school that the fire is under control and no more toxic fumes are being emitted. It is now safe for the children to leave the school but only if they are supervised by an adult.
- All roads surrounding the chemical plant will be opened at 4:00 PM.
- 3:10 PM The school's telephone message is changed to include information pertaining to how/when the children will be dismissed & released to parent/approved adult beginning at 4:00 PM at either the school or the off-site evacuation shelter.
- Extended day programs are notified of the 4:00 PM dismissal time. They are told that if a parent picks up a child that normally attends the extended day program, the school will notify them by 4:30 PM. The rest of the children will remain at the extended day programs until the parent comes at the "normal" pick-up time.
- The transportation service which conveys students to the extended care program is notified of the 4:00 PM dismissal time.
- 4:30 PM All children have been released to home or the extended care program.
- Each child and the local media have been given a fact sheet developed by the public information officer.
- The principal calls a staff meeting to determine what type of post-crisis follow-up they feel should be provided for staff and students and if they have any recommendations to improve the Crisis Management Plan. The principal asks that they submit their suggestions, in writing, the next day.
- Next Day The Crisis Management Team meets to discuss follow-up and evaluate the Crisis Management Plan.
- The social worker has written some suggestions for the teachers to use during the day to normalize the day for the students
- A parent meeting is held at 7:00 PM to address parent concerns.

SCHOOL-AGE DISASTER SCENARIO (Section 3 - continued)

1. What are some suggestions to normalize the school day for the students?
2. What type of crisis intervention should be provided for the students and/or staff?
3. How would you identify which intervention type would be best for a particular child or adult?
4. How can the social worker assist parents to help the children/themselves after the crisis?
5. How would an evaluation of the Crisis Management Plan be conducted?

Remedial Actions to Take:

(page C)

1. Teacher cues for class
 - A. Allow students time to adjust post-emergency
 - B. Delay introducing new or difficult subjects in class
 - C. Identify vulnerable children
 - D. Help children feel safe
 - E. Acknowledge and normalize their feelings – allow them to discuss/validate fears
 - F. Remain calm and reassuring
 - G. Maintain a normal routine but don't push if a child seems overwhelmed
 - H. Make time for class discussion/answer questions factually/dispel rumors
 - I. Be a good listener and observer
 - J. Emphasize their resiliency – identify past coping skills used successfully when they have previously been frightened or upset
 - K. Follow-up on prognosis of hospitalized children
 - School nurse contacts family to follow-up; she keeps principal and superintendent informed
 - If appropriate, classmates can make get-well cards
 - Assist in return to school
 - L. Prepare for reminders of emergency
 - Anniversaries
 - Hospitalized children returning to school
 - Fire alarms/sirens
2. Debrief staff and students
 - A. **GCI:** Group crisis intervention (psychological first aid) – guided class discussions in a supportive environment that involves providing an introduction, facts, dispelling rumors, sharing stories, sharing reactions, providing empowerment and a closing
 - B. **ATSM:** Acute traumatic stress management – a practical approach to dealing with the psychological consequences of a traumatic event by stimulating adaptive coping mechanisms and to stabilize more severe reactions among students; it has 10 stages:
 - Assess for danger/safety for self and others
 - Consider the mechanism for injury
 - Evaluate the level of responsiveness
 - Address medical needs
 - Observe and identify
 - Connect with the individual
 - Ground the individual
 - Provide support
 - Normalize the response
 - Prepare for the future
 - C. **IC:** Individual Counseling – for students who experience severe symptoms after a crisis and are evaluated by a mental health professional – can consist of play therapy, art therapy, talking therapy, drug therapy, cognitive behavioral therapy, and a combination of therapies
3. Observe for signs/symptoms of stress-related behaviors
 - A. Crying/irritability
 - B. Lack of interest in school/poor concentration
 - C. Fear of coming/leaving school

Remedial Actions to Take:

(page C continued)

- D. Acting out in class
 - E. Aggressive or overly submissive behavior
 - F. Shorter attention span
 - G. Regressive behavior (thumb sucking, clinginess, incontinence)
 - H. Base recommended intervention type on severity of symptoms and age of student
4. Help parents with children's/their reactions to crisis
- A. Identify signs/symptoms – unrealistic fears of future, difficulty sleeping, become physically ill, be easily distracted, fear of going to school or leaving parents, bedwetting, thumb sucking, withdrawal from extracurricular activities/friends, nightmares
 - B. Parents' fears of leaving children
 - C. Resources for mental health professionals
 - D. Monitor/turn off television if constant replaying of crisis event is aired – repetition of viewing crisis will increase anxiety
 - E. Spend family time
 - F. Reassure of no long-term ill effects
 - G. Communicate concerns with school
5. Evaluation of the Crisis Management Plan
- A. All staff members asked for input
 - B. Crisis Management Team meets the day after the crisis has occurred
 - C. Discussion held to determine strengths/weaknesses of plan
 - D. Recommendations for improvements to the plan evaluated and adopted if appropriate
 - E. All staff notified of changes in the Crisis Management Plan