

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

February 26, 2002

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: A. McBeath, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Emergency Preparedness

ORIGINATOR: G. Reynolds, Department Head

RESOURCE

STAFF: Ryan Curran, Brian Fedor, Kara Johnston, Don Ward

INFORMATION

The district has been engaged in extensive emergency preparedness planning since February of 2000. The initiative was undertaken for two main reasons:

- emerging concerns with personal and public safety within society
- a review of school emergency plans indicated that there were a variety of formats and methodologies being employed in the district

While some of the plans were quite detailed and had anticipated a wide variety of situations, others tended to be fairly limited in scope. One of the main approaches that was being used was a scenario-based model which relied on staff to be familiar with certain procedures relative to a specific scenario. When the scenario changes, the procedures often change and result in staff having to remember and/or practice a variety of procedures, protocols, code words and so on. This can result in confusion or delayed reaction in an actual emergency. Another factor that affects use of scenario-based emergency planning is that as staff move from one school to another, they are required to learn another “new” emergency plan. The differences in plans also affect a broader audience such as police, fire and medical responders who need to familiarize themselves with both the nature of the emergency, as well as the type of plan being used. This in itself involves valuable time being lost in the early stages of an emergency to do an assessment as opposed to taking action to mitigate the emergency. Initial reaction to an emergency must take place immediately in order to reduce or eliminate the threat and subsequent consequences.

In order to address the needs of a large, multi-site organization such as our district, an approach to emergency preparedness was adopted that would meet the following criteria:

- easy to use and implement
- effective for use in a wide variety of situations
- flexible and transferable
- standardized responses wherever practicable
- accepted by stakeholders and emergency responders

The process to design the system commenced with interview meetings with school staffs, Edmonton Emergency Response Department, Edmonton Police Services, Edmonton Disaster Services, as well as provincial authorities. As a result of the meetings and subsequent analysis, it was decided that a template model would be employed in the district. A template

model involves the utilization of a standardized set of procedures and response mechanisms that are applicable to most emergency situations. It clearly identifies chain of command, individual and group responsibilities, as well as defined response protocols. When an emergency is triggered or declared, there is an instantaneous, consistent and predictable reaction by those involved. All information relative to an emergency is communicated, filtered and coordinated through the Security Services 24 hour emergency number, which is a direct link with other district and municipal emergency resources.

Ten schools within the district have participated in lockdown drills which are outlined in the Emergency Preparedness Guide template. Security staff and School Resource Officers have had the opportunity to observe these drills. They found that the drills were done efficiently, in a timely manner and that they were an invaluable learning tool for identifying site specific needs. The School Resource Officers are supportive of the plan itself, and their feedback has been an important part of the development process.

Initially the school Emergency Preparedness Guide template was developed in a paper format, that was colour-coded and keyed for ease of use and was distributed in a binder. Based on feedback from users, it was subsequently developed as an easy-to-use compact disk and is supported on the district intranet. The Emergency Preparedness Guide template has been distributed to all district schools and as of this date, 142 schools have received direct inservicing on its use. The plan and implementation inservicing are provided to schools at no charge to schools.

The current district plan allows for oversight of the emergency response and coordination with other agencies that might be involved. The plan is activated on a progressive basis established by the nature of the emergency. A level 1 response emergency can be resolved by a school utilizing minimal district or municipal resources (Appendix I). In the event that a situation arises that is beyond the capability of an individual school, a level 2 district response is activated. For example, within Facilities Services the next level of response to a school emergency is the Emergency Management Response Team. This team consists of key staff who would coordinate a response to and recovery from the school emergency. The group would liaise with other district departments such as Communications, Leadership Services and Consulting Services. In the event of a large scale emergency, a level 3 response would include a formal committee of key district stakeholders who would oversee the emergency and coordinate with municipal agencies such as Fire, Police, Emergency Medical Services, Dangerous Goods, Capital Health and others.

By design, emergency preparedness efforts have been focused on ensuring that district school needs are being addressed as a first priority. Within this context, emphasis has been placed on the need for being prepared and on initial response, both at the school and at the district level. The next phase of development involves the consolidation of plans and roles beyond the initial response stage. This will involve a formalized structure that encompasses other key players at the district level with a focus on initial response on a broader scale, as well as an emphasis on recovery from emergencies.

Interest in the district's plan from outside the district is increasing. Inquiries have been received from other school districts and police agencies. They are all interested in receiving a sample of the plan and the potential for purchase and implementation beyond the district is

significant. The plan has been mentioned in the January 2002 edition of the Occupational Health & Safety Magazine. The following is an excerpt from the article:

"Because the risk of death from violence is statistically much higher than from fire in today's North American schools, the Edmonton Public School Board's revised emergency response plans include steps to be taken in the lockdown of a school. Generally, the board favours a response-based approach to emergencies. A standard response, easily modified to suit any emergency, is straightforward and flexible."

The prospect of outside markets presents an exciting opportunity for Edmonton Public Schools and reinforces its leadership in this area.

AMB:khj

APPENDIX I: Response Levels