

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

April 13, 2004

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: A. McBeath, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: District Emergency Preparedness Support Team

ORIGINATOR: A. Habinski, Executive Director School and District Services

RESOURCE
STAFF: Brian Fedor, Don Ward

INFORMATION

The purpose of this report is to update trustees regarding district-level planning and initiatives related to emergency preparedness.

Background

The district has been engaged in extensive emergency preparedness planning since early in 2000. This initiative was undertaken because of emerging concerns with personal and public safety within society and because a review of school emergency plans indicated that there were a variety of formats and methodologies being employed in the district. It was believed that our students and staff would be better served with a comprehensive and consistent approach to emergency preparedness planning.

In order to address the needs of a large, multi-site organization such as Edmonton Public Schools, an “all hazards” approach was adopted that would:

- be effective for use in a wide variety of situations (“all hazards”)
- be easy to use and implement
- be flexible and transferable
- use standardized responses wherever practicable
- be accepted by stakeholders and emergency responders

Since the beginning of this initiative, several templates have been developed which allow schools and other district locations to plan in a consistent manner for a variety of emergency situations. The templates include evacuation procedures, security alert procedures and a variety of checklists which are customized for various staffs groups and functions (e.g., principal, administrative assistant, head custodian, etc.). An Emergency Preparedness Instruction Manual was developed and distributed to schools and other locations.

District Framework

Although responses to specific emergencies may differ, a consistent three-level framework is used to categorize all emergencies and to respond accordingly:

- A Level 1 emergency is one that can be resolved by the school or location with limited resource deployment from the District Emergency Preparedness Support Team and municipal resources.
- A Level 2 emergency is an incident which exceeds an individual school's capacity for resolution. It is an incident which needs to be managed by municipal resources in cooperation with the district Emergency Preparedness Support Team's coordination. An example would be a large-scale fire in a school involving injury or loss of life.
- A Level 3 emergency is an incident which will require municipal support for the coordination of on-site emergency operations. It is the kind of incident which could require the activation of one or more schools as a reception site. Examples might include a tornado, an ice storm, a refinery explosion or a major toxic goods spill.

The district emergency preparedness plan is designed to place the coordination of both the response to and the recovery from an emergent situation with the District Emergency Preparedness Support Team. When a school calls the Security Emergency line, any district and municipal resources that may be required to respond to the identified level of emergency will be activated. The involvement of the District Team eliminates the need for school administrative staff to coordinate the multiple aspects of an emergency and allows them to concentrate on the immediate well being of students and staff.

District Emergency Preparedness Support Team

In addition to the need for individual schools and locations to have an emergency plan, it was recognized that there must also be a district-level response system. Such a system has been in place for many years. However, the planning processes undertaken since 2000 have served to refine and expand the district-level system so that it can best serve our staff and students as it takes on the function of overseeing the district's emergency preparedness and emergency response activities, including coordination with other agencies that might be involved.

The latest step in the district's over-all emergency preparedness planning has been the creation of a District Emergency Preparedness Support Team. The team's membership represents the critical central services functions that would have to be involved in coordinating the district's response to a multi-school or whole city emergency, and in implementing plans for business continuance in the event of such an emergency.

The Emergency Preparedness Support Team provides a consistent and coordinated response mechanism when district resources are required to augment a school's emergency plan during an emergent situation. It is coordinated by Facilities Services and consists of staff members from Leadership, Planning, Communications, Consulting, General Counsel, Transportation, Maintenance, Information Technology, Employee Assistance, Occupational Health and Safety, and Finance.

The District Emergency Preparedness Support Team's plans and responses are predicated on over a hundred different scenarios as defined by the nature of the emergency. In addition to responding to emergent situations, members of the District Emergency Preparedness Support Team provide schools with proactive advice and assistance in areas such as communications, counselling, legal advice and recovery strategies.

Team members meet regularly to assess district needs, plan initiatives and amend the district plan as required. A sub-committee has been formed to assist schools by providing emergency preparedness inservice training, materials and strategies. The sub-committee is working on developing materials and strategies as follows:

- Communications and Consulting Services are developing a school communications package which will provide schools with information pertaining to public perceptions concerning emergency preparedness.
- Consulting Services Psychologists will assist in developing communications and strategies for addressing possible student anxieties related to various emergency preparedness activities.
- A communications package is being designed which will assist principals to develop appropriate practice drill procedures as well as effective communications to students, staff and parents.
- The Communications department is researching the feasibility of a demonstration video related to emergency preparedness procedures.
- Security Services and Leadership Services are developing methodologies to utilize in training new principals.

A review of administrative regulations related to the operation of schools under emergency circumstances and emergency drill procedures is currently being conducted. The board will be kept informed of progress in this regard.

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