

"Critical Emergency Management Failures in Schools: Lessons from Recent Tragedies"

All communities experience natural disasters and even crises created by malicious actors. To effectively safeguard students and staff, schools must address common mistakes in emergency preparedness. Here are the top 3 mistakes with examples of what can go wrong if we don't consider the importance of preparedness.

Inadequate Communications Plan: In 2019, the University of North Carolina in Charlotte faced a harrowing situation when an active shooter opened fire on campus. The initial alert, "Run, Hide, Fight," was issued promptly, but subsequent communications were lacking. Students and staff sheltered in place for over two hours without clear updates. This led to confusion and misinformation spreading via social media, primarily on Twitter. Community members were angry and students were left wondering what was happening. An effective Communications Plan should include clear initial instructions, timely updates, and post-event information to ensure everyone knows how to respond and where to turn for help.



Lack of Whole Community Planning: The Uvalde Elementary school shooting in 2022 tragically highlighted the consequences of ignoring community feedback. During fire drills and security inspections, it was noted doors were frequently left propped open. This was a serious security lapse. Despite repeated warnings from various community members, these concerns were not addressed. The failure to act on this feedback contributed to the severity of the attack. Schools

should actively engage with the entire college community when planning for crises and ensure all feedback received is acted upon to prevent critical oversights.

Drill Deficiencies: In August 2016, Baton Rouge experienced catastrophic flooding due to unprecedented rainfall. Although schools had conducted fire drills, they had not prepared for differences in evaluation during a flood. They had not put flooding into any portion of their Emergency Preparedness Plan. This lack of preparedness hampered evacuation efforts, jeopardized safety, and delayed the return to school for students and staff. While schools cannot anticipate every possible emergency, they must prepare and practice for probable crises.



The Colleges are continuously working to improve their emergency preparedness strategies. This includes updating and improving communications plans, integrating feedback from the entire school community, and conducting regular drills. So, when the alarm goes off during a drill remember that 3 minutes of annoyance makes our lives better and safer on campus.

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