

# EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

## Do you have a written and formalized Emergency Response Plan?

Every church hopes and prays that nothing bad will ever happen to it. But statistics show that the odds of a tragedy striking at some point in the life of a church are not in a congregation's favor. Possible tragic events can range from fires, tornadoes, hurricanes, acts of violence to the moral or criminal misbehavior of a pastor, staff member or key leader. These incidents are never planned by the church, but a planned response to them should be developed and implemented.

Without a plan, the wrong responses and actions tend to occur. Some responses can actually compound the negative impact of the original event. By having a plan in place, the church not only helps itself, but also is in a better position to care for the needs of its members and visitors. Its standing in the community can remain stable and ministry can continue.

### Recommendation(s):

The key to responding to tragic events is rooted in crisis preparation and planning. Each congregation should form a safety and security team. One of the team's main responsibilities should be to identify the church's areas of vulnerability and begin to prepare response plans to meet each area identified. Typically, the team should look at the following areas:

- Emergency Contact Information
- Fire
- Evacuation Plan and Shelter Procedures
- Severe Weather / Natural Disaster
- Accidents and Medical Emergencies
- First Aid Reminders
- Theft and Vandalism
- Intruders / Trespassing / Weapons Threat
- Missing Persons / Child
- Child Sexual Misconduct Allegation Response
- Bomb Threat
- Gas Leaks
- Power Outage / Blackout

### Tasks:

1. Crisis Emergency Preparedness Plan.

Develop and implement a crisis emergency preparedness plan into the church's operating procedures.

2. Crisis Emergency Preparedness Plan Training.

Train all church employees, volunteers and members responsible for the implementation of the crisis emergency preparedness plan.

## Do you have evacuation procedures in place in case of an emergency?

Even though the vast majority of churches in America meets local fire codes and have exit locations marked, it is surprising how many churches have not determined and documented the best routes and procedures for evacuating their buildings. In the event of a fire, gas leak or other on-site emergency, nothing is more important than getting everyone out of the building quickly and safely.

### Recommendation(s):

Evacuation procedures are a critical component to an effective emergency preparedness plan. The following items should be implemented:

- An emergency evacuation diagram should be developed and posted throughout the building. This diagram should identify all exits, evacuation routes, safe assembly spaces, fire extinguishers and First Aid kits.
- All routes of egress from the building are free from obstructions.
- All exit signs are visible, adequately illuminated and in good condition.
- Emergency lighting units should be installed, in good condition and periodically tested.
- All exit doors should be in good working order, have panic hardware installed and open outward.
- People must be accounted for once they are outside to make sure everyone is safe.
- If Sunday school classes, day cares and nurseries are present, these personnel are responsible for evacuation of these areas. Also, parents/guardians should meet their children at specific locations.
- Baby cribs should be equipped with rollers so they can easily be pushed from the building and the doors from the nursery should be wide enough to accommodate the cribs.
- Ushers and or staff members should provide assistance to the elderly and persons with special needs.
- If additions have been constructed over the years, the church should evaluate and plan evacuation routes and procedures from those locations as well.
- In the event of a fire, elevators should not be used. Appropriate signs should be placed at elevators stating this.

### Tasks:

1. Emergency Evacuation Procedures.  
Develop and implement written emergency evacuation procedures into the church's operating procedures
2. Emergency Evacuation Training.  
Train all church employees, volunteers and members responsible for the implementation of the emergency evacuation procedures that impact their jobs.
3. Emergency Evacuation Diagram.  
Create emergency evacuation diagram(s) and conspicuously post throughout the building.
4. Emergency Evacuation Drills.  
Conduct emergency evacuation drills with employees, volunteers and members.

## Does the church have a designated “Safe Shelter” area inside the building?

In the event of a tornado, hurricane or other severe storm, it is critical to identify the safest locations inside the building to seek shelter.

### Recommendation(s):

Safe Shelter areas should be identified and the following guidelines should be followed:

- Oftentimes, a basement may be one of the most secure shelter areas, but if no basement is available, the shelter area should be free of windows.
- Restrooms and interior hallways on the lowest or ground floor (with doors secured at either end) are other options.
- Once shelter areas have been identified at the church, inform staff and congregation members about the locations and mark the areas with permanent signage on the walls or doors.
- Storm season is great time to publish reminders about the shelter areas in the church bulletin, a newsletter or via the church website.
- A basic disaster supply kit should be provided in the safe shelter area and include the following:
  - Food and water.
  - Blankets.
  - Flashlight.
  - Portable, battery-powered radio or television.
  - NOAA Weather/All Hazards radio.
  - Extra batteries.
  - First Aid kit and manual.
  - Emergency contact numbers.
  - Mobile phones or other communication devices.
- Do not evacuate unless given specific instructions by church leaders.

### Tasks:

#### 1. Safe Shelter.

Identify a safe shelter area within the building and mark the location with permanent signage on the walls or doors.

#### 2. Communicate Safe Shelter Location

Inform church employees, volunteers and members of the safe shelter location and establish future communication (bulletins, newsletters, web pages, etc.) prior to and during the storm season.

#### 3. Basic Disaster Kit.

Install a basic disaster kit for the safe shelter area.

## Has the church developed a crisis communication plan?

Prior to an emergency or disaster, planning and preparation are needed to determine how your church will communicate with three key audiences: congregation members; the media; and official investigators.

### **Recommendation(s):**

During an emergency, determine how you will alert the congregation.

- Nearly everyone will recognize the sound of a fire alarm, but consider using a PA system or other method to let people know what is going on and what they should do.
- Following an emergency or disaster, if the church sustained significant damage, church members should be told about a temporary meeting location. Techniques for communicating this information include a church Web site, e-mail blast, recorded phone message, text messaging, phone tree, and announcements in the local newspaper.

When an emergency, crisis or tragedy strikes, there's a good chance the church will need to speak with the local media and investigators:

- The church should have a pre-appointed and qualified spokesperson to field all questions. This person should be articulate and have previous experience with media relations and talking with investigators. Without a spokesperson, the church could make conflicting or inappropriate statements, which may exacerbate the situation or tarnish the church's reputation.
- Consideration should be given to appointing a back-up spokesperson and consider advising the rest of the staff and leadership not to speak with the media. Instead, refer the media to the pre-appointed and qualified spokesperson.

### **Tasks:**

1. Communication during an Emergency.

Determine the best method to alert the congregation during emergencies.

2. Temporary Meeting Location.

Secure a temporary meeting location and how this will be communicated to the congregation.

3. Spokesperson and Back up.

Select a person who has previous experience in communications to field all questions from the media and or public officials. Select a second spokesperson as a backup.

## Does the church have a Disaster Recovery Plan?

If the church was completely destroyed by a fire, tornado, hurricane, earthquake or flood, would it need to shut down indefinitely, or could it begin operating quickly at another location? Would church leaders have access to important records for financial matters and insurance coverage to rebuild the facility? With a disaster recovery plan in place, your church will have the best chance of surviving a catastrophic event.

### **Hazard Example(s):**

A church suffered an arson loss of over \$1 million. In addition to dealing with the loss of its building, finding alternative worship and office space, renting equipment, and communicating with contractors, the church also spent the next several weeks with the arduous task of compiling an inventory of all the damaged contents for insurance purposes. Since no inventory had been done before the fire, much of the inventory was completed from memory and the few photographs that remained of the church's interior.

### **Recommendation(s):**

In addition to crisis communication, elements of a disaster recovery plan include all of the following, and copies should be stored at a secure, off-site location:

- A list of important phone numbers, accounts, addresses, etc.
- Complete an inventory worksheet of all the church's equipment, furnishings, and other non-cash assets. Include date obtained, purchase price or value, quantity, and description of each item.
- Inscribe your church's name or phone number on valuable equipment and furnishings.
- Photographs and video recordings of items within the church's interior are recommended.
- Back-up files of computer data and important records.
- Copies of vital paper records, and the emergency response/disaster recovery plan should be made.

Another important step in disaster recovery is to make arrangements ahead of time for an alternative meeting space and equipment. One effective way to do this is by establishing a reciprocal agreement with another church allowing use of their facility in the event of a disaster, and their use of yours.

### **Tasks:**

1. Vital Information  
Compile a list of important phone numbers, accounts and addresses.
2. Itemized Contents Inventory  
Complete an itemized inventory list of all items, equipment and other valuables within the church along with photographs and video recordings of these items within the church's interior.
3. Back Up Records  
Create back-up files of computer data, important records, copies of vital paper records and a copy of the disaster recovery plan. Keep this information at a secure off site location.
4. Temporary Meeting Location  
Secure a temporary meeting location and use of equipment. Determine how this will be communicated to the congregation.

## Have church facilities been surveyed to reduce the potential damage associated with natural disasters?

When the phrase "natural disaster" is mentioned, one of the first things that comes to mind is the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina in 2005. With the cost of damage estimated at \$35 billion or more, many churches were destroyed or severely damaged.

Hurricanes are of course just one type of natural disaster which may or may not be a concern for your church. Other natural disasters include any of the following; hurricanes, earthquakes, tornadoes, floods, severe storms, lightning and hail.

### Recommendation(s);

Inspect your facility to determine how safe and secure it will be in the event of a natural disaster and make modifications if needed.

- Trees and limbs that could fall on the building in high winds (or earthquake) should be trimmed and or removed.
- Keep roofs well maintained and clean out gutters, eaves and downspouts.
- Correct any potential fire hazards and consider installing lightning rods and electric surge protection. The surge protection should be installed to protect sensitive electrical equipment such as organs, computers, telephones, copy machines, and fax machines. Make sure that electrical circuits are properly grounded.
- Anything that can blow away or cause damage to your building should be secured. This includes all outdoor furniture, signage, canopies, and playground equipment.
- In areas prone to earthquakes, hazards that might fall and cause injuries during a quake should be secured such as lighting fixtures, pictures, mirrors and book shelves. And adhere to local seismic building standards.
- Make sure appropriate individuals know the location of all utility shut-off switches and valves in case they need to be turned off. Shut-off locations should be documented.
- In potential hurricane regions protection should include:
  - Ideally, hurricane shutters should be used to cover all windows. Facilities with stained-glass windows need additional protection, as the cost to replace them is more significant. Though plywood is often recommended, a framed cover made of plywood (at least  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch thick) or a manufactured hurricane shutter offers better protection from breakage and extended damage that could occur.
  - If possible, use double (storm and solid) entry doors. Doors should have at least three heavy-duty hinges with a dead bolt security lock. Header and threshold bolts can add additional protection. Doors should be made of solid wood or hollow metal.
  - All roofs should be in good repair. Old framing and roofing materials will often succumb to the high winds and rain associated with a hurricane. Further, the use of hurricane straps will give much greater protection. They can be retrofitted from the attic or when the roofing is replaced.
  - In addition to windows and doors, wall openings such as garage doors should be strengthened and vents should be covered.

### Tasks:

1. Natural disaster facility inspection

Inspect facilities to determine how safe and secure it will be in the event of a natural disaster. Complete necessary corrections/modifications if concerns are found.

## Does your staff know how to handle vagrants or suspicious persons on church property during office hours?

At many churches, if security measures are not in place a vagrant or other suspicious person can get unrestricted access to the church building. While these individuals may not have evil intent, it is far better for the church to have a planned security response to head off any criminal activity and to respond to any threats posed.

### Recommendations:

To reduce the risk of threats from vagrants or suspicious persons during church office hours, consider the following:

- Control access to the building on weekdays by keeping exterior doors locked.
- Utilize an intercom with electronic door release system to admit persons into the building.
- Maintain a physical barrier in the reception area such as a glass partition, countertop, or half-door.
- Require all visitors to sign-in at a guest registry. Additional precautions would be to provide a visitor badge in exchange for their identification and require that visitors be escorted while on the premises.
- Install a "panic button" in the office that activates an alert in other offices/parts of the building and/or provides a direct alarm to police.
- Establish a "code word" or "distress signal" that will alert co-workers to a problem. For example, if church workers typically address each other by first name, establish a code that if they are in distress they will address a co-worker more formally by last name.
- Workers should not be alone in the office but, if alone, all doors should be locked.
- Individuals seeking assistance should be screened by providing identification and completing a request for assistance to verify their need.
- Only non-cash assistance such as food or gas cards, tokens, or vouchers should be supplied.
- Do not maintain large sums of cash in the office.
- Do not confront a threatening person on church property. Report the individual to police and observe him or her from a distance.
- Do not hesitate to call 911 if you feel that your personal safety is threatened.

### Tasks:

#### 1. Vagrant or Suspicious Person Policy.

Develop and implement a written policy on how to handle a vagrant or suspicious person on church property into the church's operating procedures.

#### 2. Vagrant or Suspicious Person Policy Training.

Train all church employees, volunteers and members on the vagrant or suspicious person policy that impact their jobs.

#### 3. Vagrant or Suspicious Person Facility Inspection.

Survey facilities to determine how safe and secure it would be in the event a vagrant or suspicious person would enter the premises. Complete necessary corrections/modifications to the facility if concerns found during inspection.



## Do you have a plan to respond to acts of violence at your church?

Many people are surprised to learn that shootings are the most common violent acts committed in churches and schools. Other typical incidents include robberies, assaults and rapes. As places of trust and compassion, most churches never expect to experience such horrendous crimes. So it's easy to be caught off guard. While the typical church may never experience an act of violence, it is best to be prepared to respond to such an eventuality.

### Hazard Example(s):

In December 2017, a man was welcomed into an Austin, Texas church benevolence room where he wouldn't be cold. Once inside, he pulled a box-cutter and robbed the two 75-year-old benevolence volunteers including taking one of their vehicles as he fled the scene.

In August 2017, an usher and another man were shot and killed as they went up the steps to the S Chicago church. It happened just as the Sunday morning services were about to begin. The killers wore bandanas as they ran towards the men and opened fire.

### Recommendations:

There is no assurance that a violent episode in church can be avoided. To be better prepared for any potential acts of violence, the following steps are suggested:

- Designate a point person on security issues to be the church security director. Define the responsibilities of that position.
- Train ushers and greeters. Ushers and greeters can serve as your front line of defense if they are prepared and trained to watch for anything suspicious or out of the ordinary.
- Contact local law enforcement for assistance with training on responding to emergency situations and establishing a security plan for your congregation.
- Consider seating ushers or other personnel in key areas of the worship space including rear seats near entry doors and front seats near the platform to be ready to respond to disruptive individuals.
- Train ushers to scan seating and parking areas for suspicious, agitated or unusual behavior and be prepared to respond or contact authorities.
- For disruptive individuals without a weapon, ushers should escort the individual from the service and contact 911 if circumstances dictate.
- If ushers are alerted to an individual with a weapon approaching the facility, doors should be locked and 911 should be called.
- For individuals with a weapon, remain calm, generally follow directions from the individual (unless doing so greatly increases danger such as orders into an enclosed space or a vehicle), stay low behind pews, seats, or other cover, and contact 911 as soon as feasibly possible.



**Tasks:****1. Acts of Violence Policy**

Develop and implement a written policy on how to handle violence into the church's operating procedures.

**2. Acts of Violence Policy Training**

Train all church employees and volunteers involved with implementation of the violence policy that impact their jobs.

**3. Security Director**

Select an individual to be the church's security director.

**4. Contact Local Law Enforcement**

Contact local law enforcement for assistance with training on responding to emergency situations and establishing a security plan for your church.

**Does the church utilize security guards?**

The use of professional or volunteer security guards at church has become more commonplace in recent years. Basically, a church has two options regarding security guards: 1.) maintain its own security guard force or 2.) hire a professional security guard service.

The use of armed security guards is also becoming an option which presents additional exposures to the church. While the presence of armed guards can potentially prevent or bring an end to an episode of church violence, their use also raises other issues such as the risk of injury or death to innocent bystanders and claims for the use of excessive force.

**Recommendation(s):**

When considering the use of security guards, the following guidelines should be considered for using your own staff/volunteers, hiring an outside firm and arming security personnel.

Maintaining your own security guard force:

- The church is responsible for running background checks and screening all security guard personnel.
- The church is responsible for the training and supervision of its security guard personnel.
- The church is responsible for ensuring that its security force complies with all licensing and certification requirements that might exist under your state's law.
- The church will in most circumstances be liable for the acts of its security guards.
- One option is to hire off-duty active law enforcement officers. An advantage in hiring these individuals is that they will have superior training and experience. However, the church must still train these individuals in what their role will be in emergency situations.

## Arming Your Security Force

If your organization decides it wants to pursue an armed security force, here are some tips for your security plan:

- If you don't know where to start, hire a security consultant to help you assess your school's security risks. Be sure to hire a reputable professional who maintains proper credentials. You may be able to obtain recommendations from your local police agency, school system, or area businesses.
- Discuss all aspects of your plan with your local law enforcement agency.
- Create a written security plan that includes a violence response plan. Armed security response is only one part of a response plan.
- Have a process and procedure for third party investigation of an officer involved shooting. (Keep in mind this process can be quite expensive. Estimates are \$200,000 – \$700,000 for an investigation of a shooting by qualified outside investigators.)
- Notify your insurance company of your decision. Your insurance carrier will have underwriting requirements and will adjust the premium in accordance with the risk involved.
- Post notices that you are using armed security officers.
- Create and publicize that weapons are not allowed to be carried on your grounds by anyone other than your security officers. Your security personnel should know the location of every weapon on campus and who has access to it.
- If an administrator knowingly allows a volunteer or employee to carry a weapon onto the campus to provide armed security, the administrator may be held as a representative of the school. Actions taken by both the administrator and the armed individual could cause the school liability for negligence and civil damages. Loss of life or injury caused by an error in using the firearm could result in criminal prosecution for those involved.
- Know your state laws regarding the type of weapon your security force can carry. Many states require an armed security force to be specifically registered and/or licensed by the state.
- A background check must be performed on anyone who will be armed. No one should carry a fire arm on your campus that has any history of violence.
- All armed personnel should undergo regular training and weapons qualification. Most states require qualification with the type of weapon used at least once every six months.
- Identify an appropriate location to secure weapons when not in use. At a minimum a firearms safe with extremely limited access must be required.
- Your organization is responsible for the actions of the security force.

## Using Contracted Security Personnel May Be the Best Option

The responsibility of being a weapon-carrying member of your security team is not small. GuideOne Insurance feels the best plan may be to utilize a private security guard company.

- Appropriate security personnel are trained and supervised on a daily basis in their jobs.
- There's no substitute for the experience that a security officer gets on the street dealing with people on a regular basis.
- Hire security personnel from the upper level of the candidate pool, such as former/retired law enforcement personnel. They have undergone extensive training and screening, and they provide a very favorable impression to employees and visitors.
- Security officers are not only trained how and when to shoot a gun, they're trained to learn how not to shoot one.
- Don't pay below industry average. In many instances the security officer at the front desk is the first impression a client gets of your school and you want to make sure they look professional and provide a professional appearance. Prior to 9/11, security professionals were treated more as a commodity, and firms paid as little as possible to hire a security officer firm. Since then, however, it is more important to have a well-trained security professional with a professional appearance.
- Properly trained security officers in the field are accustomed to dealing with violent situations and threats. The first reaction is not to pull out a weapon; it's the last resort.

### Tasks:

#### 1. Local Laws Regulating Security Personnel

Consult and abide by local law requirements for using security personnel.

#### 2. Security Guard Selection.

Screen, train and provide supervision for security guards. Confirm security guards hold appropriate licenses and permits.

#### 3. Hired Security Guard

Security services have appropriate licensing. Enter into a hold harmless agreement with the security service and be named as an additional insured on the service's insurance policy.

#### 4. Armed Security Guard

Consult with legal counsel, local law enforcement and insurance agent to determine feasibility of using armed security personnel. Armed security personnel are properly licensed, hold necessary permits, and only carry legal and authorized weapons

## Does the church have a medical emergency response plan?

Oftentimes, religious organizations are faced with a minor medical incident that needs nothing more than First Aid. Other times, churches may find themselves in the middle of a full-blown medical emergency. Knowing what to do in either situation can mean the difference between the incident staying minor or developing into a crisis.

### Recommendation(s):

A medical emergency is something nearly every church has experienced or will sometime soon. Because the likelihood of a medical emergency is so high, this is another key area in your emergency response plan. Please consider these recommendations as you develop your plan:

- Train ushers and other front-line staff on how to respond to medical emergencies.
- Coordinate and provide basic First Aid, CPR and AED (Automated External Defibrillator) training for ushers, staff and volunteers.
- Designate a leader to direct others during a medical emergency.
- Identify medical personnel within the congregation and request their assistance.
- Have a well-stocked, up-to-date First Aid kit that is easily accessible. Since the first several minutes are critical, the right supplies should be on hand.
- Practice your medical emergency response procedures.
- In the event of an injury or other medical emergency:
  - Call 911 or a designated individual listed in an emergency contact list.
  - Identify your location, church name, address, and area of the building to the dispatcher.
  - Describe the situation (e.g. what happened, type of injury and help needed).
  - Obtain or provide First Aid.
  - Alert designated church leader(s) that an emergency is occurring.
  - Contact a staff member who has reference to any personnel files for medical emergencies.
  - Designate an individual to notify the family.
  - Station ushers or other volunteers in the parking lot to direct emergency medical responders.

### Tasks:

1. Emergency Response Plan  
Develop and implement a medical emergency response plan.
2. Emergency Response Personnel.  
Select medical leader and medical personnel within the congregation.
3. Emergency Response Plan Training.  
Train employees and volunteers in CPR, First Aid, AEDs and how to respond to medical emergencies.
4. Emergency Response Plan Drills  
Practice emergency response plan drills on a scheduled basis.
5. Emergency Response Medical Supplies.  
Obtain basic medical supplies including a First Aid kit. Medical supplies are kept up to date and appropriately monitored.

## Does your church provide emergency shelter services?

Assisting others in a time of need is part of a religious tradition and why many churches open emergency shelters. If your church wants to take this step, the initial planning of the project is very important to ensure a safe operation. As with any project, it is necessary to set goals in line with the resources available. For instance, are there truly enough responsible people who will volunteer to work at the shelter? Proper planning and appropriate safety measures will go a long way in assuring your shelter is a safe operation for everyone involved.

### **Recommendation(s):**

Once the decision is made to offer a shelter, it is recommended that the premises be prepared, safety procedures be implemented, and rules be set. Please consider the following:

- Check with local officials concerning the requirements for establishing an emergency shelter - some localities require shower facilities or other minimum requirements.
- Consult with your local fire department concerning maximum occupancy and fire safety precautions. A good rule of thumb is 45-60 square feet of space per occupant and one toilet for every 16 persons.
- Consult with your local law enforcement authorities. They may provide additional security based on the nature of your operation.
- Plan ahead for evacuation of the shelter in the event of a fire or other emergency. Make sure all of your staff and volunteers are made aware of this emergency plan.
- All exits should be clearly marked and have clear access in and out.
- Rules should be made and enforced regarding smoking. A prominent display of all rules will help avoid misunderstandings.
- Access to other areas of the building should be secured.
- Oversight and supervision of the building and occupants is critical. An employee or volunteer from the church should be designated as the supervisor of all volunteers. A supervisor should be on-site at all times and a minimum of two volunteers should be awake at all times to monitor the activity. Staff and volunteers must be trained.
- Use of, or possession of illegal drugs, alcohol or weapons should not be permitted. Unlawful or unruly activities by guests should not be allowed and the hiring of outside security may be an option to ensure safety and security of your guests, volunteers and your building.
- Each entrance and exit to the shelter should be monitored at all times.
- Clarify with local officials expectations for supplying food, water, and other supplies to individuals housed in the shelter. If the church is expected to provide food and water, make sure that an adequate supply can be obtained and that sufficient personnel will be on hand to distribute these items. Meals prepared in the church kitchen should be prepared only under the supervision of persons trained in food safety. Adequate sanitation concerning food storage, preparation and serving should be followed.
- Adequate sanitation procedures should also be followed concerning bedding, restrooms/showers, and garbage removal. Make sure that you have adequate janitorial support to handle the increased occupancy of your building.
- Plan in advance how the church will respond to persons who contract a communicable disease or who become seriously ill. Contact the local health department for more information.

- Set hours should be established so that individuals cannot enter after a set time (e.g. no one allowed to enter the shelter after 10 p.m.)
- All guests should be required to complete a Guest Registration Form and should be given a copy of the shelter rules. Guests should be logged in daily and be required to sign in and out. Each guest should provide you with at least one person to contact in case of an emergency.
- Interior and exterior walking surfaces should be monitored to be in good condition, adequately lighted and kept free of slip, trip and fall hazards.
- No animals or pets should be permitted, except bona fide service animals for the disabled.
- Attractive nuisance hazards that can be expected to attract children (discarded large appliances, unprotected equipment, open holes or wells, paths, stairwells) should be eliminated or controlled to protect children from coming into contact with the condition.
- Guests with special needs (elderly, wheelchairs, walkers, etc.) should be taken into consideration and planned for accordingly. Guests that would require medical monitoring should not be allowed.
- Basic Rules for an emergency shelter should include:
  - No alcohol or illegal drugs permitted on the premises;
  - No weapons of any kind permitted on the premises;
  - No violence or verbal abuse will be tolerated;
  - No admittance after 10 p.m.;
  - A quiet sleeping time will be maintained by 11 p.m.;
  - No smoking in the building;
  - Children should remain with their parent(s) or guardian(s) at all times;
  - Guests must stay only in the room or area assigned to them and may not wander about in other areas of the facility;
  - Candles, camping lanterns, oil lamps and other open flames are prohibited; and
  - Breaking any of the rules will result in guests being asked to leave the shelter

## **Tasks:**

### **1. Emergency Shelter Policy**

Develop and implement a written emergency shelter policy into the church's operating procedures.

### **2. Local Governing Officials**

Contact and abide by local governing officials, including fire and law enforcement concerning the requirements for establishing an emergency shelter.

### **3. Emergency Shelter Policy Training**

Train all church employees and volunteers who are responsible for implementation of the emergency shelter policy.

## Will your church provide relief workers following a disaster?

After a disaster occurs, such as a hurricane, tornado, or flood, it is natural for the church to reach out to assist storm victims. Such assistance sometimes involves churches sending teams of workers into disaster areas to help with relief and recovery efforts.

While relief teams provide needed support to areas devastated by a disaster, the teams can be exposed to a variety of dangers, including mold, raw sewage, contaminated water, infectious disease, toxic or hazardous substances, and dangerous work sites.

### **Recommendation(s):**

As another act of care and compassion, individuals in your church may feel passionate about volunteering to serve as relief workers following a disaster. While this is a kind and noble gesture, planning and procedures are highly recommended for relief worker efforts. To help protect relief workers, and the church that sent the workers, consider the following:

- Consult an expert. Churches should coordinate their relief efforts with agencies and organizations experienced in relief work. Denominational and other religious disaster relief agencies, such as the American Red Cross, have knowledge of the needs of a particular area and how to best respond to those needs. Consider aligning your church with a sponsoring disaster relief organization that will provide structure at the destination site, rather than attempting to do it on your own.
- Consult with the church's insurance agent on coverage. Discuss the coverage afforded by your church's current policy for the volunteer and employee members of the relief team with your insurance agent. This is particularly important if your relief efforts involve international travel. Consider supplemental liability, property, and/or workers' compensation coverage for your team, if necessary.
- Establish criteria/qualifications for workers. The relief team may face a challenging environment and physically demanding work. For those reasons, use caution in selecting the relief team members to include only those whose physical and mental health is compatible with the rigors of the work they will be performing.
- Obtain health clearance and immunizations. Relief workers should receive medical clearance from their doctors in order to participate. Ideally, workers should be assessed at least four to six weeks before travel so that any necessary vaccinations can be administered.
- Obtain signed release forms from workers. The members of your disaster relief team should know that there are risks inherent in disaster relief activities. Given their assumption of these risks, it is not unreasonable to ask team members to release the church from liability for any injury or damage that may occur to them while participating. Likewise, have a list of emergency contacts for each team member and consider requesting consent for emergency medical treatment in the release document.
- Provide training for workers (Red Cross or denominational). Learn from the sponsoring relief organization about the type of work the relief team will be participating in and find out what pre-trip training opportunities are available. For example, First Aid training and other classes may be available from the American Red Cross and from denominational or private relief agencies. The American Red Cross also offers disaster services training.
- Ensure adequate supervision of workers. The use of various hand and power tools, ladders, and lifting heavy or bulky objects increases the exposure of workers getting injured.



Supervision is necessary to make sure workers are wearing the appropriate personal protective equipment (hard hats, safety glasses, etc) using equipment and tools correctly and demonstrating proper lifting techniques.

- Implement transportation safeguards. Appropriate transportation to and from the relief site should be secured. Avoid cheap transportation alternatives that lack safety features, such as the use of 15-passenger vans.
- Consider medical evaluations. Team members who become ill or injured after returning home should seek evaluation and treatment from a healthcare professional. Similarly, relief team members who experience fever, rash, respiratory illness, diarrhea/intestinal upset, or other unexplained symptoms in close proximity to the trip should seek timely care from a medical provider.

### **Tasks:**

#### **1. Disaster Relief Policy**

Develop and implement a written disaster relief policy into the church's operating procedures.

#### **2. Disaster Relief Policy Training**

Train all employees, volunteers and members who are responsible for implementation of the disaster relief policy.