

EMERGENCY RESPONSE PLANNING GUIDE FOR CHILD CARE PROVIDERS

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Emergency Response Planning Guide for Child Care Providers

Vermonters are no strangers to emergencies. Floods, ice storms and toxic spills from overturned trucks and railroad cars have required temporary closure, evacuation and relocation of children from child care facilities. In such emergencies children may or may not understand what is happening and may be physically or developmentally unable to rescue or protect themselves. Programs that have followed the steps toward preparedness and planning are better able to protect lives and return to normal operation in a shorter time period.

This ***Emergency Response Planning Guide*** serves as a planning tool for Vermont Child Care Programs and is not intended to replace or interpret child care licensing regulations.

This Guide provides basic preparedness and planning information that can be customized to fit the size of your program. As per child care licensing regulation, all programs must have a written emergency response plan. Try not to make your plan so complex that people (staff, parents, town officials, etc.) won't be able to recall the necessary steps when faced with an emergency situation.

Where your program is located is important in developing your emergency response plans. Now is the time for you to develop personal relationships with local town Emergency Management Directors, fire, law enforcement and public works personnel. These people would most likely respond to an emergency at or near your facility. They can assist you in your determination of potential disaster threats and hazards close to your program.

Reducing the Potential Threat of Emergencies

- Fires can start and spread quickly, which is why we all need to be careful and educated when it comes to fire safety. Just a little bit of planning can make a big difference. See the Fire Prevention and Safety Section of this guide for additional information.
- Ensure that there are never obstructions (locked doors, strollers, storage of teaching materials or recyclables, etc.) that prevent safe exit from the facility.
- Consider the purchase of a generator for backup power. A generator must be installed by a licensed electrician.

Emergency Response Plan (ERP)

It is important for parents to be aware of your plan, especially where children will be taken in the event of an evacuation. Newsletters, e-mail and parent meetings are all effective methods for communicating changes or updates to your ERP.

Identify a local radio or television station to be your source of broadcast communications. When parents enroll in your program inform them to tune into this station to receive emergency information.

Keep emergency contact information for each child easily accessible. Include both home and work numbers, e-mail addresses, and cell phone numbers for parents and others who are authorized to be responsible for each child. Have an out-of-town contact number for each child and employee, so that if phone lines are down in a parents' work area, someone within the family's network can be contacted with notification that the child or employee is safe. Inform families to call this out-of-town contact for updated information if needed. Be sure what your backup communications plan will be if phone service is interrupted.

When you have a change in staff, orient them to your ERP and their responsibilities within the plan.

Review and update your ERP at least once every 365 days.

Emergency Supplies

Maintain an inventory of at least 72 hours of emergency supplies (see list below).

- Make sure you have first aid supplies.
- Consider any child's medical needs when creating your supply inventory.
- Keep on hand portable radios with extra batteries. Check battery expiration date periodically.
- Provide multiple flashlights with extra batteries and bulbs within each room.
- Maintain an adequate supply of personal hygiene and sanitation supplies including toilet paper, paper towels, disposable diapers, wipes and re-sealable plastic bags.
- Instruct staff to keep their own personal necessity items safely stored at the program.
- Store extra bedding and blankets to provide warmth and comfort if utilities fail.
- Include any items necessary to meet the needs of staff and children.

Water

- Provide an adequate supply of commercial bottled drinking water to last staff and children a minimum of 72 hours (1 gallon for each child and adult per day).
- Date the bottled water supply, and replenish it at least once per year to keep it fresh. If your water supply has an expiration date, you may have to check it more often than once a year.
- Additional water may be needed for flushing toilets. Identify an available source in your area.

Food

- Maintain a dated 72-hour emergency supply of non-perishable food. Consider any child's food allergies when acquiring non-perishable food items. Use and replace food on a regular basis.
- Maintain a supply of disposable bowls and eating utensils and a manually operated can opener.

Emergency Backpacks

Emergency backpacks should be kept ready- to-go. For larger programs, there should be a backpack for each group. The backpack should include emergency supplies in portions to meet the evacuation needs of the number of children. Make sure that backpacks are not so cumbersome that they hinder the evacuation process. Emergency information on children, medication, first aid supplies, sanitary items, flashlight, portable radio and comfort items should be included.

Communication

It's best to have multiple ways that you can communicate with emergency responders, staff, and parents during an emergency. Consider having access to a landline and a cell phone at your facility. If the power goes out, the landline telephone may not work; so you may need access to a cell phone. If cell phone towers have an interruption in service, your cell phone may not work; so you may need access to a landline.

Transportation

During an emergency, it may become necessary to transport children to another location. Develop a plan to transport children, using the appropriate child restraint seats. Obtain permission from parents to transport their children in an emergency.

If you are unable to transport children during an emergency, work with your local Emergency Management Director to ensure they are aware of the challenge.

Fire Prevention & Safety

Prevention

Maintain heating equipment and chimneys by having them cleaned and inspected annually by a qualified professional.

Keeping things that can catch fire away from heat sources. Follow manufacturer's instructions and any code requirements for heating equipment.

Make sure all fuel-burning equipment is vented to the outside to avoid carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning.

Detection

For the best protection, install photoelectric smoke alarms that are electrically wired, with a battery backup, in every sleeping area, outside each separate sleeping area, and on every level, including the basement.

Install carbon monoxide alarms close to where you sleep.

Maintain alarms by regular testing, cleaning and replace the batteries at least once a year.

Make sure everyone knows the sound and understands the warning of the smoke alarm and knows how to respond.

Smoke alarms expire after 10 years. So if your alarm is more than 10 years old, you should install a new one.

Escape

Make a home escape plan. Draw a map of each level of the home. Show all doors and windows. Discuss the plan with everyone in your household, including visitors.

Identify at least two ways out of every room. Make sure all doors and windows that lead outside open easily.

Choose a place to meet outside that is a safe distance away from your home.

As part of your plan, designate one person to get infants and small children or anyone who may need assistance, out safely.

Suppression

Only adults who are trained should use fire extinguishers. Learn to use them before a fire occurs. Fire extinguishers should be used only on small fires.

Don't attempt to fight a fire unless:

- Fire is small and contained. You have safe egress route (can be reached without exposure to fire).
- Available extinguishers are rated for size and type of fire

If you are building or remodeling an existing home, consider installing a home fire sprinkler system.

If you live in a rural area, locate the closest reliable water supply like a dry hydrant, pond or river. Provide clear year-round access to water supplies that might be required for firefighting.

Other Fire Safety Tips

Use common sense in the kitchen. Limit distractions when cooking and don't leave a hot oven or stovetop unattended.

Keep anything that can catch fire, such as dish towels or wooden spoons, away from your stovetop.

Install barriers such as safety gates around fireplaces, ovens and furnaces.

Keep candles at least 12 inches away from anything that can burn, and always blow them out when you leave the room or before you go to sleep.

Make a habit of placing matches, gasoline and lighters in a safe place, out of children's reach. Avoid novelty lighters or lighters that look like toys.

To prevent possible fires, avoid plugging several appliance cords into the same electrical socket.

Place covers over unused electrical outlets.

Safety from Carbon Monoxide

Make sure your home has a carbon monoxide alarm. For the best protection and as required by Child Care Licensing Regulations and state law, install a carbon monoxide alarm on every level of your home, especially near sleeping areas.

Don't use a grill, generator or camping stove inside your home, garage or near a window. Don't use your oven or stovetop to heat your home.

If you need to warm a vehicle, remove it from the garage immediately after starting. Don't leave a car, SUV or motorcycle engine running inside a garage, even if the doors are open.

Preventing Burns

Don't carry a child while cooking on the stove. It's better to put your child in a high chair where you can still see them.

Keep an eye on appliances such as irons, curling irons or hair dryers that can heat up quickly or stay warm. Unplug and safely store these items after use.

Keep appliance cords out of children's reach, especially if the appliances produce a lot of heat.

Preventing Scalds

To prevent accidental scalding, set your water heater to 120 degrees Fahrenheit or the manufacturer's recommended setting. Check the water with your wrist or elbow before giving your baby a bath.

To prevent hot food or liquid spills, use the back burner of your stove and turn pot handles away from the edge.

Keep hot foods and liquids away from the edge of your counters and tables.

Other Home Safety Tips

Preventing Falls

Use approved safety gates at the tops and bottoms of stairs and attach them to the wall, if possible. Remember to read the manufacturer's instructions to make sure you have the right gate for your needs. Not all gates are safe for use at the top of stairs.

Keep babies and young kids strapped in when using high chairs, swings or strollers. When placing your baby into a carrier, remember to place the carrier on the floor, not on top of tables or other furniture.

Properly install window guards and stops to prevent window falls. Windows above the first floor should have an emergency release device in case of fire.

Water Safety

Actively supervise children in and around water. Avoid distractions of any kind, such as reading or talking on the phone.

Make sure home pools have four-sided fencing that's at least 4 feet high with self-closing, self-latching gates to prevent a child from wandering into the pool area unsupervised.

Every child is different, so enroll children in swimming lessons when you and the child's parent feel they are ready. Teach young children from an early age not to go near or in water without an adult. Older children should swim with a partner, every time.

Poison Prevention

Store all household products and cleaning solutions out of children's sight and reach. Young kids are often eye-level with items under the kitchen and bathroom sinks.

Keep cleaning products in their original containers. Don't put a potentially poisonous product in something other than its original container (such as a plastic soda bottle) where it could be mistaken for something else.

Keep liquid laundry packets out of children's reach and sight. Keep packets in their original container and keep the container closed.

Keep Harmful Plants that may be poisonous out of reach of children or pets.

Medication Safety

Put all medicine and vitamins up and away and out of sight after every use.

Use the dosing device that comes with the medicine, not a kitchen spoon. Kitchen spoons aren't all the same, and a teaspoon or tablespoon used for cooking won't measure the same amount as the dosing device.

Preventing TV and Furniture Tip-overs

Mount flat-panel TVs to the wall to prevent them from falling off stands. Follow the manufacturer's instructions to ensure that you have a secure fit.

Use brackets, braces or wall straps to secure unstable or top-heavy furniture to the wall.

If you have a large, box-style cathode ray tube (CRT) TV, place it on a low, stable piece of furniture.

Sleep Safety

Make sure babies sleep on their backs and in their own crib, bassinet or play yard. Room sharing is a safer option than having your baby sleep in bed with you.

Choose a firm mattress covered with a tight-fitting crib sheet for your baby's crib. Avoid using soft bedding, pillows, stuffed animals and bumpers in the crib.

Preventing Choking and Strangulation

Keep a special eye on small pieces, including button batteries that may be included in electronic toys. While these kinds of games are great for older kids, they can pose a potential danger for younger, curious siblings. Keep small objects out of children's reach and sight. Look for and remove small items that are at your child's eye level.

Keep cords and strings out of children's reach, including those attached to window blinds.

Check Your Car Seats

Seventy-three percent of car seats are not used or installed correctly, so before you hit the road, check your car seat. If you are having even the slightest trouble, questions or concerns, certified child passenger safety technicians are able to help or even double check your work. Please contact the Vermont Car Seat Hotline which is listed in the resources section of this document.

Emergency Response Procedures

Depending on the situation, you may decide to utilize one of the following emergency responses. It is imperative that you maintain emergency egress from the room, regardless of the response you are using.

Shelter-in-Place

Shelter-in-place simply means staying inside the building you are in.

During a release of toxic chemicals or other emergencies where air quality is threatened, shelter-in-place keeps the occupants inside a building and out of danger. Local authorities issue orders for shelter-in-place during chemical emergencies. Local officials will relay emergency action steps to the media on a continual basis until the crisis is over.

Once the order for shelter-in-place has been issued, do not leave your building location until you receive official notification that the danger has passed. Close and lock all the doors and windows to the outside. (Windows often seal better when locked.) If

possible, bring outdoor pets inside. Turn off all heating systems. Turn off all air conditioners and switch intakes to the closed position. Seal any gaps around window-type air conditioners. Turn off all exhaust fans in kitchens, bathrooms and any other spaces. Close all fireplace dampers. Close as many internal doors as possible. Use tape and plastic food wrapping, wax paper or aluminum wrap to cover and seal fireplaces, bathroom exhaust and grilles, range vents, dryer vents, and other openings to the outdoors to the extent possible. Seal any obvious gaps around external windows and doors. Close the drapes, curtains or shades for additional protection.

If the vapors begin to bother the staff and children, hold wet cloths or handkerchiefs over the nose and mouth. For a higher degree of protection, go into the bathroom(s), close the door(s) and turn on the shower(s) in a strong spray to “wash” the air. Do not worry about running out of air to breathe, as this is very unlikely in normal homes and buildings.

Evacuation

Identify evacuation sites. There may be a building or site that is open to the public during your hours of operation and is within walking distance of your facility. Contact the owner or other appropriate person to determine its availability for possible sheltering. In the event that a disaster would strike a large area surrounding your facility, it is wise to identify a secondary site. Notify parents of evacuation sites and protocols.

- Post a current and accessible written evacuation plan with at least two escape routes on each level of the facility that is used by children.
- Determine which children or staff may require additional assistance to evacuate during a drill or actual emergency.
- Always ensure that you have a system in place to account for children and staff at all times.
- Count children often. Be sure staff know the children for which they are responsible.

Lockdown

Lockdowns typically occur when there is a threat within the facility. During a lockdown, staff should:

- Lock interior doors
- Turn out the lights
- Move everyone out of sight
- Keep everyone quiet

Lockout

Lockouts typically occur when there is a threat outside of the facility. During lockouts, staff should:

- Bring everyone indoors
- Lock exterior doors
- Increase awareness of the situation

Emergency Drills and Procedures

- Conduct evacuation drills at least once a month, ensuring that children and staff are evacuated in less than 3 minutes. Conduct at least 1 drill every 365 days, while children are sleeping or resting.
- Be sure your staff know what to do for each type of emergency.
- Develop and practice plans for relocating to more than one other site if necessary.
- In case the electrical system is not functioning establish an alternative way to convey an immediate message to all staff in all areas that they need to shelter-in-place or evacuate immediately.
- Consider including your neighbors, governing board, town emergency officials, local emergency planning committee, businesses, and volunteers in your planning.
- Contact your local Emergency Management Director, fire department, or local Chapter of the American Red Cross to assist with training for your program.
- Ensure that staff are prepared at home, and that they have a family plan. Family Emergency Preparedness guides are available through the Vermont Division of Emergency Management and Homeland Security. Please refer to the resources section of this guide for information about how to contact the Division of Emergency Management and Homeland Security.
- Involve parents and emergency personnel in your practice sessions so they may see firsthand how well prepared you are. Emergency personnel are usually very willing to be of assistance and often have excellent ideas for improving the speed and efficiency of your evacuation. After a practice session schedule a debriefing session. You may wish to invite back parents and emergency personnel. Talk about what worked well and where you need to adjust and update your plan.

Recovering From An Emergency

Programs that are prepared for emergencies have shorter recovery times. Recovery involves efforts to return the program, staff, and children to a normal routine as soon as possible. Depending on the amount of damage, returning to normal operations could be a long-term process. If appropriate be sure that your facility has been inspected prior to reentry to ensure your facility had not sustained structural damage.

The cumulative crisis-related stress of an emergency can dramatically impact the psychological and physical well-being of children and adults. Develop reasonable expectations for staff and children during the emergency when coping ability is low and frustrations are high. Despite best efforts to provide support and reassurance to children and adults, they may continue to experience symptoms and reactions which may indicate a need for professional consultation. These symptoms may include:

Children: Withdrawn behavior, depression, helplessness, generalized fear, loss of verbal skills, sleep disturbance, loss of toileting skills, anxious attachment and clinging, uncharacteristic hostility or acting out.

Adults: Withdrawal or depression, feelings of inadequacy and helplessness, difficulty in concentration, slowness to respond, substance abuse, psychosomatic or real physical symptoms (headache, bladder/bowel problems, chest pains, cramps, sleep disturbance, change in food consumption patterns).

Program staff can assist in psychological recovery by giving children and adults correct information about the emergency or event. Provide opportunities to talk and share feelings with others, facilitating communication with loved-ones or family members outside of the program.

Be aware of your local Mental Health Agency as they may be able to provide resources following a disaster. Please see the resources section of this guide for additional information about the Designated Agency in your area.

Resources

There are many resources and agencies available to assist in your emergency planning efforts. Some of the resources and agencies you may want to contact for further information on emergency planning follow:

- Agency of Human Services: 802-241-0440 and <http://humanservices.vermont.gov>
- Child Development Division: 1-800- 649-2642 and <http://dcf.vermont.gov/cdd>
- Division of Emergency Management and Homeland Security: 1-800-347-0488 and <http://demhs.vermont.gov>
- Division of Fire Safety: 1-800-640-2106 and <http://firesafety.vermont.gov>
- Vermont Department of Health Lead Poisoning Prevention and Surveillance: 1-800-439-8550 and <http://healthvermont.gov/enviro/lead/>
- Vermont Car Seat Hotline: 1-888-868-7328
- Local Emergency Management Directors: Contact your town clerk and request to speak with you local Emergency Management Director.
- Mental Health/Designated Agencies: <http://mentalhealth.vermont.gov/DAlist>
- The American Red Cross, New Hampshire and Vermont Region: 1-802-660-9130 and www.redcross.org/local/nhvt
- The American Academy of Pediatrics:1-800-433-9016 and <https://www.aap.org>
- Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) www.fema.gov/children-and-disasters
- Federal Small Business Administration: 1-800-827-5722 and www.sba.gov
- Insurance Institute for Business and Home Safety: <https://disastersafety.org>
- National Child Care Information Center: (703)934-3603 and www.icfi.com/insights/projects/families-and-communities/national-child-care-information-center
- HeadStart Emergency Preparedness: 1-866-763-6481 and <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/shlc/tta-system/health/ep>
- Administration for Children and Families: (202)401-9246 and <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/program-topics/emergency-response-recovery-0>
- Safe Kids Coalition: (202)662-0600 and www.safekids.org

Informational Sources

- Vermont Division of Fire Safety 1-800-640-2106 www.firesafety.vermont.gov
- National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) www.nfpa.org
- U.S. Fire Administration (USFA) www.usfa.fema.gov

- Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) - Multi-Hazard Planning for Child Care, Online Course
www.training.fema.gov/is/courseoverview.aspx?code=IS-36
- American Association of Poison Control Centers
Emergency. Information. Prevention. 1-800-222-1222 and <http://www.aapcc.org/>
- Vermont Child Care Licensing: 1-800-649-2642 option 3 and <http://dcf.vermont.gov/cdd/laws-regs>
- I love u guys Foundation: 1-303-426-3100 and www.iloveuguys.org/