

Preparing Schools for Severe Weather Emergencies



Central Texas is at risk

of many types of
natural disasters.

We are on the edge of tornado alley, at-risk of hurricane activity from the Gulf of Mexico and subject to frequent flash floods.

Central Texas schools are more likely to be affected by severe weather more than any other type of emergency.



Despite practice of fire
and lockdown drills,

34.3%

of Texas school districts
did not perform
any weather drills
at all district locations.

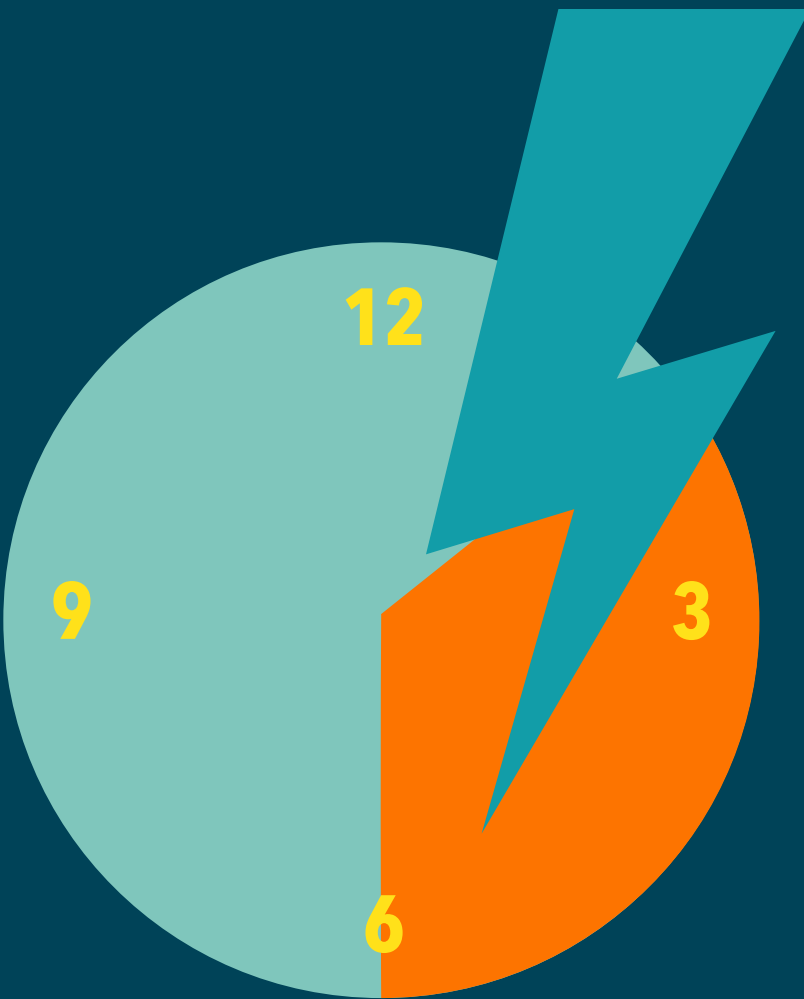


**No student
has ever died**

due to a fire on a
school campus.

This is likely related to regular,
institutionalized practice
of fire drills.

The Texas School Safety Center recommends ongoing self-assessment
and creating a culture of readiness, as opposed to annual reviews.



The majority of severe weather **strikes between 2:00–6:00 p.m.**

Students frequently are in dismissal, on school busses, in athletic practice, extracurricular activities or engaged in after-school programs during this time. Yet, there is limited or no safety practice during these activities.

Additionally, there is limited practice at non-campus district facilities (ex: Central Office, Business Office, Bus Facilities).

Schools can implement safety plans that may
save lives and reduce injury
during an emergency.



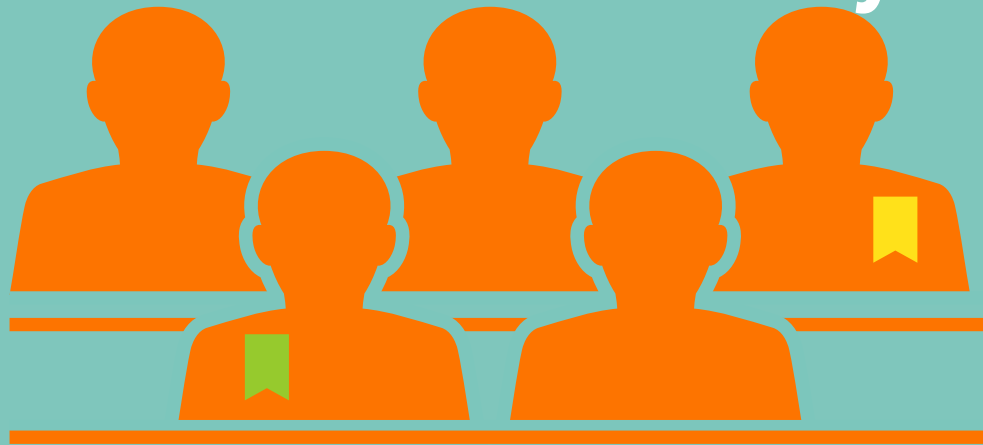
Training, drill practice, & frequent exercises

are key features of a comprehensive emergency management program.

Preparedness builds the capacity to respond effectively and recover
from emergency incidents. (TXSSC Emergency management Toolkit)

Campus and district leaders and designated staff should be trained in the

National Incident Management System (NIMS) and the Incident Command System (ICS).



These systems help to designate who is in charge and the chain of command during an emergency.

Having a clear, coherent structure for follow during an emergency reduces the risk of chaos, confusion and panic in students, their families and school personnel.

NIMS: <http://www.fema.gov/national-incident-management-system>
ICS: <http://www.fema.gov/incident-command-system>

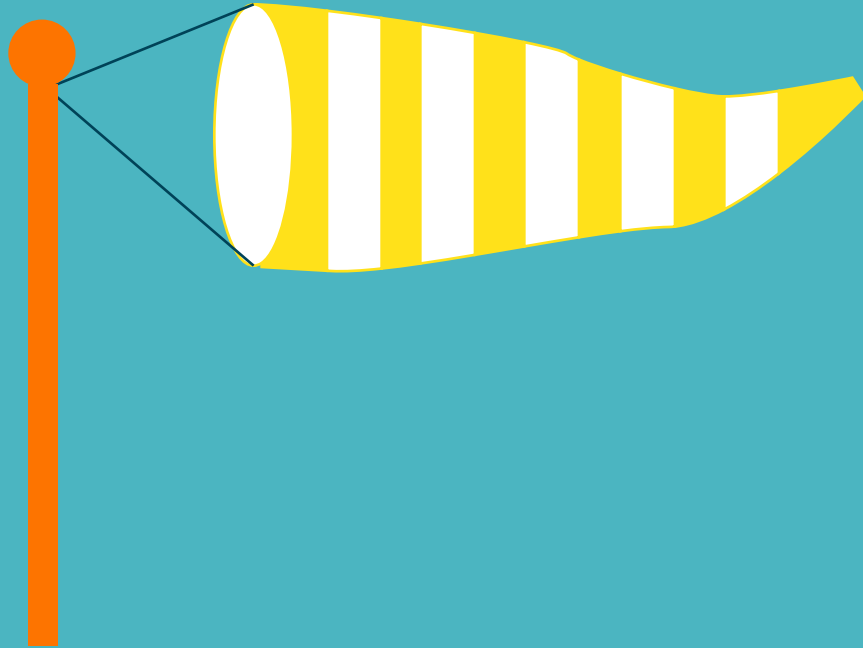


Relationships between schools and emergency service providers are essential.

Training for campus and district leaders on relevant emergency service entities on the local, county and state level should be provided annually.

Frequent interaction with local or county providers of EMS, Law Enforcement, Fire and the regional affiliate of the National Weather Service helps build trust and improved communication during a critical incident.

Each campus should have **appropriate tools to monitor severe weather.**



When a decision is made to cancel activities, modify transportation or shelter-in-place, campus and district leaders must communicate effectively with students, staff, families and community partners.

This should include contingencies for loss of power, internet and cellular phone service.

Table top exercises can be used to prepare for a variety of circumstances, especially with multiple hazards occurring simultaneously.

Relationships with local and regional media outlets can be an effective way to **communicate with the community during a critical incident.**



Local and regional television affiliates, newspapers, and radio stations can partner with schools in many ways to prepare students and their families for severe weather. Many schools have weather reporting stations that can be incorporated into learning.

School/media relationships can reduce misinformation and panic during a critical incident.

Training, practice and communication with parents are important components of emergency planning that are frequently neglected.



At the beginning of each year, school leaders should provide written communication with parents regarding expectations, procedures and communications for emergency situations. Parents should be aware of reunification sites and alternative locations in case of emergencies if the campuses or classrooms have been damaged.

Again, districts should look at alternative methods of communication if normal channels are not operational.

Responding to severe weather is not a one-size fits all proposition.

Each school and district should develop procedures and processes that fit with the campus needs and assets.

Following a severe weather incident, holding a debriefing session with all partners will help to improve emergency response in future events.

A thorough analysis of what worked, what did not work and what can be changed in the future is the key to operationalizing best practices.



Bottom Line: **Practice saves lives.**

Additional resources:

TEXAS SCHOOL SAFETY CENTER

<http://txssc.txstate.edu/>
877.304.2727

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS GUIDE

<http://txssc.txstate.edu/tools/emergency-management-toolkit/>

NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE (NWS)

<http://www.weather.gov>

NWS AUSTIN/SAN ANTONIO BRANCH

<http://www.srh.noaa.gov/ewx/>

NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE SCHOOL PREPAREDNESS GUIDE

<http://www.nws.noaa.gov/os/severeweather/resources/ttl6-10.pdf>

TORNADO PREPAREDNESS FOR SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

<http://www.spc.noaa.gov/faq/tornado/school.html>

For assistance in coordinating services to help your school
or district prepare for emergencies, contact:

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