

School Emergency Management Plans Frequently Asked Questions

1. What does the new law and rule for school safety plans say?

The new law and rule define which schools must submit plans, the requirements for developing and submitting plans and the penalties for not complying with the law. The law can be found at <http://codes.ohio.gov/orc/3313.536> and the rule at <http://codes.ohio.gov/oac/3301-5>.

2. When do this new section of law and the new rule go into effect?

*The new law went into effect Sept. 17, 2014, and the new rule becomes effective Dec. 25, 2014; **however**, enforcement will not begin until Jan. 5, 2015.*

3. How does the new law modify the old section of law?

It replaces the old section of law.

4. What does the term “administrator,” as used in the law, mean?

The "administrator" is the superintendent, principal, chief administrative officer or other person having supervisory authority over a school. Every school has a single person that is administratively responsible for the building. Various terms and titles are used throughout the law to refer to these people. The law places various responsibilities on administrators, regardless of their titles.

5. The old law used the term “school safety plan.” The new law uses the term “emergency management plan.” What is the difference?

“Emergency management plan” is a standardized term commonly used by emergency first responders and emergency management agencies that incorporate both safety and security concerns. The old law and the new law both require schools to have comprehensive, all-hazards plans to deal with emergencies. The new term, “emergency management plan” does not change that expectation.

6. What documents are actually required?

The comprehensive emergency management plan consists of a minimum of four documents:

- *A protocol for addressing serious threats to property, students, employees or administrators of the building. It is commonly referred to as the emergency operations plan;*
- *A floor plan for each floor of the building;*
- *A site plan that includes all building property and surrounding property; and*
- *A contact information sheet that contains important information about the building, its administrators and the community first responders.*

Samples of each of these documents are available on the SaferSchools website: <https://saferschools.ohio.gov>.

7. What is an “Emergency Management Test”?

An emergency management test is a regularly scheduled drill, exercise and any appropriate follow-through activities designed for the assessment and evaluation of the emergency management plan and its capabilities. An administrator must conduct at least one test per year for each building under his or her control. To comply with the statute, the test must meet all of the criteria outlined below:

- **Be scheduled.** You cannot count an actual emergency or a false alarm emergency as a test of your school’s procedures.
- **Contain drills.** A drill is an activity that tests a single procedural operation (e.g., a test of initiating a cell phone alert system or a test of school security personnel conducting a lockdown).
- **Contain exercises.** An exercise is a test involving coordination of efforts (e.g., a test of the coordination of first responders, including police, firefighters and emergency medical technicians).
- **Contain follow-through activities.** A follow-through activity is an activity designed to review the test, such as a survey or interview to obtain feedback from participants.
- **Be designed for assessment of emergency plans and capabilities.** This means that your test should have measurable goals. For example, “Everyone involved in the emergency response and notification procedures will understand his or her role and responsibility.”
- **Be designed for evaluation of emergency plans and capabilities.** Design the test so that, using the assessments, you can judge whether the test met its goals. For example, “The evacuation process accounted for the diverse needs of all members of the school and community.”

8. How does this requirement differ from the requirements for fire drills and tornado safety precautions?

The requirements for fire drills and tornado safety precautions (ORC section 3737.73) involve preparing students and staff by having them practice evacuation or shelter-in-place drills. The focus of the drill is on the students and staff in the school. School safety plans and emergency management tests prepare for the response to serious threats to the safety of property, students, employees or administrators.

9. Can one of the drills conducted to comply with the requirements for fire drills and tornado safety precautions also serve as the emergency management test required for school emergency plans?

You have flexibility in designing emergency management tests. For example, you may conduct a tabletop exercise (i.e., a simulated scenario) or conduct a live test. An example of a live test could be one of the drills required for fire drills and tornado safety precautions. Whichever method you use, your test must address the procedures and processes identified in your emergency management plan.

10. The law requires the administrator to “examine the environmental conditions and operations of each building to determine potential hazards to student and staff safety.” What does that mean?

It means that administrators should consult local emergency management personnel and first responders to determine what the greatest hazards are for the community and, specifically, the school.

11. The law requires administrators to “propose operating changes to promote the prevention of potentially dangerous problems and circumstances.” What does that mean?

Administrators should work with the local governing authority for the school (e.g., a local school board) in implementing a safety plan or changes to an established plan.

12. The administrator is required to involve other people in the development of the plan. Who should be involved?

The law states, “In developing the plan for each building, the administrator shall involve community law enforcement and safety officials, parents of students who are assigned to the building, and teachers and nonteaching employees who are assigned to the building.”

Safety officials include representatives from fire and emergency medical services and possibly others. A police department, a fire department and an emergency medical service serve every school. The administrator should work with those officials when preparing the plan. Additionally, the final version of the plan should contain a sign-off page for everyone that was involved in the creation of the plan.

13. In the law, what is the difference between paragraph (B)(1) and (B)(2)?

Paragraph (B)(1) addresses the need for a comprehensive emergency management plan that incorporates all phases of emergency management (prevention, protection, mitigation, response and recovery).

Paragraph (B)(2) lists some, not all, of the considerations that should be contained in the plan and requires a specific response plan for those threats. This section also requires the submission of three specific documents: a floor plan for each floor of the building, a site plan and an emergency contact sheet.

14. Paragraph (C)(2) requires the administrator to file a copy of the plan with each law enforcement agency that has jurisdiction over the school building. How can the administrator find out which law enforcement agencies need a copy of the plan?

Each school building falls under the jurisdiction of at least one law enforcement agency and many times more than one. County sheriffs always have jurisdiction for school buildings in their counties. In addition, if your school is within a city or township that has a police department, that department also will have jurisdiction. College and university police also will have jurisdiction if the school is on the campus.

15. Once the plan is filed, what else is the administrator required to do?

The administrator must review the plan at least one time by July 1 each year to ensure it is current and accurate. The administrator also is responsible for making sure the plan is kept up to date. Any time any information changes in the plan, or whenever a major modification to the

building requires changes in the procedures outlined in the plan, the administrator must refile the plan. The administrator must refile the plan every three years, even if there are no changes.

16. Can I submit my plan as a districtwide plan?

The law requires a plan to be submitted for each building under the administrator's control. Some districts will have a central plan and then building-specific information that applies to each building. In this scenario, the district plan should be submitted along with the building-specific information for each building IRN.

17. How is my school plan being evaluated?

An evaluation matrix was developed based on the "Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans" and the model safety plan information available on the SaferSchools website. The evaluation matrix, guide and model plans are available at <https://saferschools.ohio.gov>.

18. Who has access to my school plan? What personnel from my jurisdiction can upload and view our school plan?

School emergency management plans are not public records and are protected from release according to Ohio law. Only authorized individuals at the school, the Ohio Department of Education, the Ohio Department of Public Safety and the Ohio Attorney General's Office have access to the plans.

The purpose of uploading your school safety plan is so police and fire first responders will have immediate access to it during a crisis. In addition to first responders, the Ohio Department of Education and the Ohio Department of Public Safety also have access. Finally, designated staff members at the school (or district) have access.

19. Who should be involved and sign off on our local school plan?

The school administrator, all local safety officials that helped form the plan, parents or guardians of students that participated, and teachers and non-teaching staff should review the plan. The administrator may wish to have other people, such as the school board representative, sign off on the plan as well.

20. Where can I find a template or model school plan that is compliant with Ohio law?

The "Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Management Plans," and a suggested template, or model school plan, are available at the SaferSchools website at <https://saferschools.ohio.gov>.

21. How does the administrator submit the plan?

The Ohio Department of Education provides a secure login through the SAFE portal that allows school administrators to submit school safety plans. Administrators who do not have SAFE accounts should visit the following link for guidance: <https://safe.ode.state.oh.us/portal/Content/Welcome%20to%20the%20ODE%20Secure%20Web%20Portal%20User%20Guide%2012022013.pdf>.

22. What happens if my plan does not meet state requirements? How long do I have to resubmit my corrected plan?

Specially trained evaluators with Ohio Homeland Security review the plans. The school administrator is notified when a review of the school safety plan has begun. At any time, the administrator may contact the evaluator for information by calling (614) 728-0424. At the conclusion of the review, the administrator will be notified of the findings and any recommendations. School administrators must make the necessary changes as soon as possible.

23. How can I find more information on school safety grants available to Ohio schools?

Check the SaferSchools website often at <https://saferschools.ohio.gov>.