

Developing an Emergency Response Plan

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INTRODUCTION

1. Life is sacred to Jehovah. It is vital, therefore, that plans are in place for individuals to evacuate a building quickly in the event of an emergency. This includes ensuring that exit routes are clear and illuminated. For those with special needs, such as the elderly or infirm, additional planning is required.
2. Most countries require that a detailed emergency response plan be in place to allow for quick evacuation of any who would be expected to be in a building. These guidelines will discuss what to consider when creating an emergency response plan, how to develop the Facility Emergency Evacuation Map (FEEM), and how to develop a plan for assisting those with special needs.

PURPOSE OF AN EMERGENCY RESPONSE PLAN

3. In the event of an emergency, the safety of human life is the highest priority. Effective planning for safety includes identifying, eliminating, and controlling hazards and risks. All reasonable efforts should be made either to eliminate or to control potential hazards.
4. An emergency response plan should be developed so that individuals know how to handle dangerous situations, such as break-ins and active shooters on site.

ELEMENTS OF AN EMERGENCY RESPONSE PLAN

5. When developing an emergency response plan, it is important to give careful thought to the following:
 - (1) The conditions under which an evacuation would be necessary. Researching and analyzing information about potential emergencies and threats specific to each site ensures that the plan is relevant to the hazards a branch may face.
 - (2) The development of an evacuation map. Evacuation routes (primary and secondary), emergency exits, the locations of fire extinguishers and fire alarm pull stations, and the location of assembly points should be considered. The assembly points should be large open areas with enough space to accommodate personnel, as well as not too close to the building and not where emergency services might be hindered. The evacuation map and procedures to follow in the event of an emergency should be posted where they are easily accessible to all.

- (3) A clear chain of communication as well as the designation of persons who will be authorized to order an evacuation or shutdown.
- (4) Procedures for assisting people with disabilities and the infirm.
- (5) A system for accounting for personnel following an evacuation.

6. Emergency response plans should be simple and based on normal daily operations. All branch personnel potentially involved need to be familiar with the plan. Knowing in advance the necessary steps to take during and after an emergency will allow individuals to face such a situation with confidence.

IMPLEMENTING AN EMERGENCY RESPONSE PLAN

7. Once the Branch Committee has approved the emergency response plan, individuals should be assigned to implement and maintain the plan.

8. Composing an emergency response plan is a major step toward saving lives and maintaining order during an emergency. However, a plan is helpful only if individuals make good use of it. It is important to test the plan and procedures in order to anticipate or identify problems that may arise. Exercises and drills should be conducted to practice all or critical portions (such as evacuation) of the plan, especially for those with special needs. Emergency drills should be held regularly to ensure that all at a site understand the evacuation procedures. The frequency of the drills should be determined by the Branch Committee and the type of drill being completed, or as required by local laws.

9. The emergency response plan should include details on the scheduling of evacuation exercises. A thorough and immediate review after each exercise or after an actual emergency will likely reveal areas that require improvement. Individuals' knowledge of responsibilities can be evaluated by means of interviews or written tests. Records should be kept of the timing and any difficulties noted during the exercises. Any changes to the plan should be quickly communicated to all involved.

10. During the orientation of new Bethelites, temporary workers, and commuters, the emergency response plan should be carefully reviewed. Of course, training should be commensurate with the assignment and location of each worker or resident.

DEVELOPING A FACILITY EMERGENCY EVACUATION MAP

11. The purpose of a Facility Emergency Evacuation Map (FEEM) is as follows:

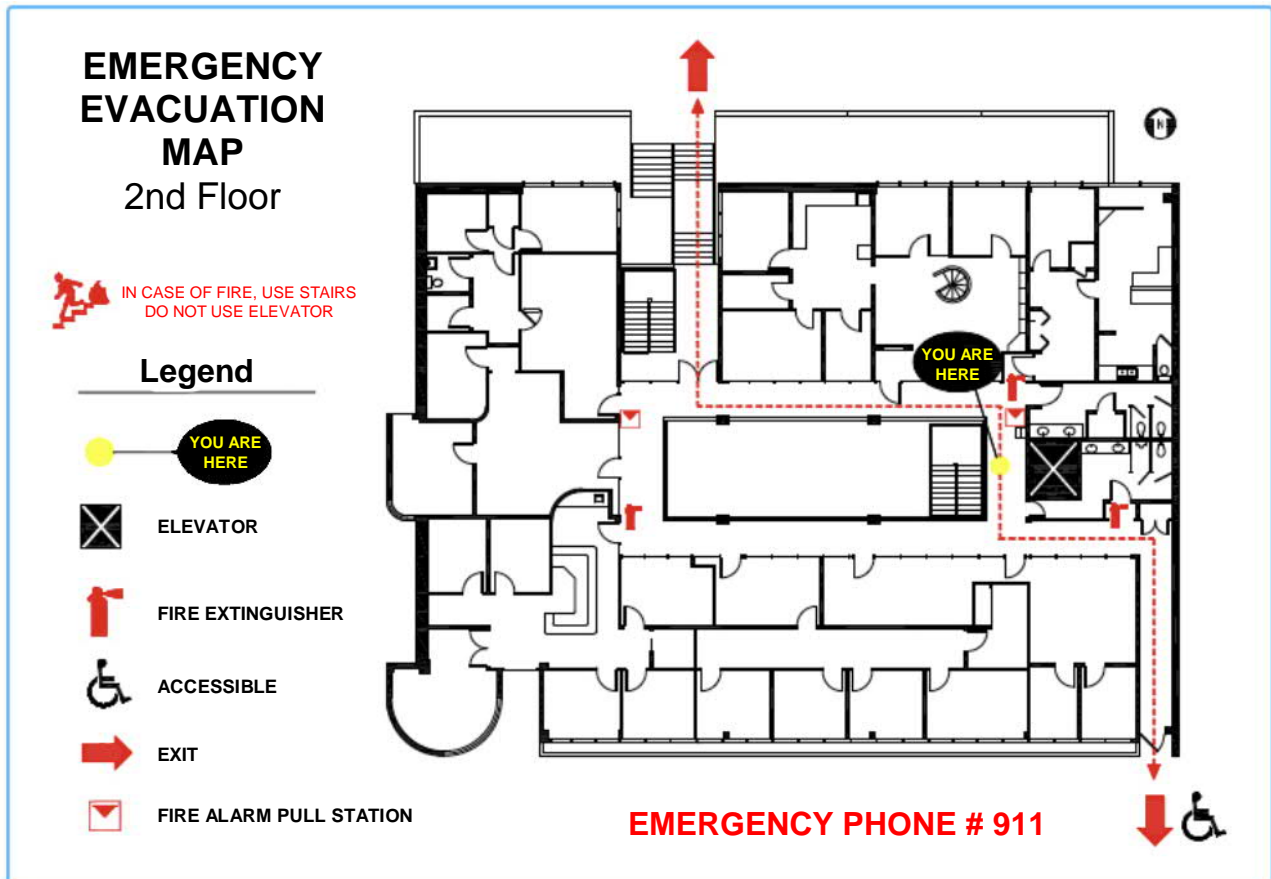
- (1) To identify emergency routes and access points for emergency services.
- (2) To show where emergency equipment is located.
- (3) To identify evacuation routes and assembly (rendezvous) points.
- (4) To help facilitate an efficient evacuation of buildings during emergencies.

12. The development of a FEEM begins with a risk assessment. Various departments, such as the Bethel Office, Maintenance Department, Building Services Department, and Medical Department, can provide valuable input. In cases involving a remote facility, the Local Design/Construction Department may be able to assist.

13. Although emergencies might happen unexpectedly, they can often be anticipated and their effects minimized by careful planning and forethought. The first step is to identify which hazards might pose a threat to the facility. The potential severity and likelihood of

each hazard should be considered while developing the FEEM by asking the following questions:

- (1) What is the nature of the emergency that might occur?
- (2) How often is the specific emergency likely to occur?
- (3) What is the extent of damage the emergency is likely to cause?



Sample Facility Emergency Evacuation Map

EMERGENCY PLANS FOR THOSE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

14. When those with special needs are located at a particular facility, careful planning is required to ensure their safe evacuation in case of an emergency. An evacuation plan for such ones should be documented as a part of the overall emergency response plan. The details of the plan will depend on the size of the branch, the risks involved, and the number of individuals having special needs.

15. **Review Potential Emergencies:** When reviewing each type of emergency that might occur, consider how staff and residents will be alerted. Is there an alarm system, a bell, or a public address system in place? Are staff and residents familiar with the various types of alerts and their meaning?

16. Depending on the type of threat, a different response may be required. This needs to be communicated clearly to ensure that the correct response occurs. Some factors that need to be considered include the following:

- (1) Will staff and residents be evacuated to an assembly area outside?
- (2) Is there an area of shelter indoors where they will need to await assistance or further instruction?

- (3) Will residents be evacuated to another care facility off-site? If so, have arrangements been made to ensure that such transportation will occur promptly?

17. Once the assessment has been completed, ensure that the following elements are included in the plan:

- (1) The specific types of emergencies that might occur
- (2) The preparations that are needed for each scenario
- (3) The means by which staff and residents will be alerted
- (4) The planned response and how it will be carried out for each scenario
- (5) The persons responsible for each action

18. **Evacuation of Critical Areas:** Consider the special needs of any residents in the infirmary or other location where evacuation may be necessary. Some considerations to include in the assessment are as follows:

- (1) Are some unable to walk?
- (2) Are there sufficient wheelchairs?
- (3) If some are confined to beds, are those beds able to be wheeled to the assembly area?
- (4) Is the path to the assembly area safe and level so as to accommodate beds or wheelchairs?
- (5) Are doors wide enough to wheel a bed through? This may require wider or double-doors on exit routes.
- (6) Are infirmary areas located on upper floors? In most emergencies, elevators are not available for use.
- (7) What are the alternative means of evacuation in case an exit is blocked or becomes dangerous? Some branches have put exterior doors on infirmary rooms that allow direct access to the outside and modified balconies with a gate for exits.
- (8) Do some infirmary residents need to remain connected to machines or medical drips? Do any connected machines have battery power supplies in the event that they need to be mobilized? How long do the battery supplies last before requiring additional power?
- (9) Will there be sufficient personnel on duty to handle a full-scale evacuation? It may require more personnel than expected to evacuate a bedridden or immobile patient.
- (10) Will there be sufficient infirmary support if some are called to other areas of the facility to provide first aid? Are additional individuals available to assist with the evacuation if this is the case?

19. Once the assessment has been completed, compose the emergency response plan and include the following elements:

- (1) Prepare and clearly display evacuation diagrams showing all safety equipment, emergency routes, shelter areas, and any other items related to evacuation of those with special needs.
- (2) Ensure that sufficient wheelchairs are available and that adequate staff knows where they are and how to respond.

- (3) Ensure that sufficient personnel are available to be able to handle an emergency that may require first aid elsewhere.

20. **Off-Site Evacuation:** During the risk assessment, consider what situations may require authorities to direct an evacuation to an off-site location. Review how an off-site evacuation of infirmity or other special needs individuals could be handled. Some factors to consider may include:

- (1) What special needs are there?
- (2) What kind of transportation will be needed?
- (3) In the event that ambulances or patient-transfer services are unavailable because of a natural disaster or other large scale emergency, what plans are in place for transportation?
- (4) Are arrangements in place to ensure that individuals' medications are readily available to be transported with them?
- (5) Is a summary of each person's medical condition prepared and readily accessible to take with them?
- (6) Do some patients require bottled oxygen? Are replacement cylinders available?
- (7) Do some require special food or thickened liquids?
- (8) Where would infirmity residents be evacuated to?
- (9) Does the medical condition of one or more infirmity residents mean that a hospital or other health-care facility is the only practical destination in the case of an off-site evacuation? If so, are contact details of nearby facilities easily accessible so that arrangements can be made quickly in the event of an emergency?

21. When composing the emergency response plan, explain how the above situations would be handled.

22. Include a regular review of the needs of the current residents as part of the plan. Ensure that up-to-date contact information is maintained for nearby hospital and care facilities for critical-condition residents.

23. **Other Challenges to Consider:** Apart from infirmity residents, there may be others who would require special assistance in the event of an emergency. This may include those with limited mobility, those needing a wheelchair, walker, or mobility scooter, and those who cannot go up or down stairs. Since it is usually unsafe to use an elevator or lift during an emergency, plans must be made to care for these ones.

24. Care for such ones may include sheltering in a place of relative safety, such as a fire-rated stairwell or other specifically designed area, and waiting for help there. If these shelter areas are used, sufficient room should be allowed for safe passage of any others leaving the building. Those responsible for caring for individuals with special needs should be made aware of any special arrangements and shelter locations selected. Shelter areas should be clearly marked on all evacuation maps to ensure that first responders are also aware of their locations.

25. In most situations, it is not recommended to attempt to lift out someone confined to a wheelchair and carry him. Doing so could easily result in dropping the person or tripping. If needed, additional assistance can be requested from first responders or from other capable individuals.

26. While composing the emergency response plan, include all potential challenges that might reasonably be expected and how these challenges will be dealt with.

27. **Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan:** Ensure during the planning process that a Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan (PEEP) has been prepared for each person with special needs, whether in the infirmary or in another location. This document should identify what actions will be taken to assist a person with special needs in each type of emergency.

28. All who are responsible for evacuating a person with special needs should be made aware of the PEEP for that person, and it should be readily available for review.

29. Preparing the PEEP should be done in consultation with the individual themselves wherever possible to ensure that all their needs and concerns are met and documented.

30. Include in the emergency response plan a copy of all relevant PEEP documents, and ensure that they are regularly reviewed and adjusted based on changes to the situation of each person with special needs.