

Developing a Church Emergency Response Plan

Develop a Planning Team

Religious leaders

Church staff & volunteers (office, facilities, event planners, etc.)

Church members with backgrounds in planning or organizational development, first responders, healthcare providers, active duty or military veterans, and insurance agents.

Others from outside the church who fit the description above.

Address Likely Scenarios (Hazards/Risks)

Medical Emergency

Fire

Tornado/Severe Weather

Earthquake

Active Shooter/Active Threat

Bomb Threat

Other: If church is next to railroad, heavily-traveled road, gas station or other facility with hazardous materials, then think about these hazards as well.

Is your church more or less likely than other locations to encounter any of the hazards above? If more likely, then your risk is increased and you should spend more time on addressing those hazards in particular.

What actions might be required for each scenario? Such as evacuation, sheltering in place, alerting 911, providing CPR, shutting down utilities, etc.

Who will perform each action? Assign by Title, not individual name, when possible.

Exercise & Training

A Safety & Security Team (or whatever you choose to call it) should be developed and placed in charge of implementing the emergency plan, training and exercising on the plan, and reviewing the plan annually to ensure it is improved upon and up-to-date. This team may, or may not, be the same individuals on the Planning Team described above.

Conduct a tabletop (discussion-based) exercise with those named in draft plan to work through any issues. Personnel from your local emergency management agency, health department, law enforcement agency or fire department may be able to help design and facilitate the exercise. Update the plan based upon lessons learned during tabletop exercise.

Develop a training plan so that staff and congregation members are aware of what to do. Obviously, members who play key roles in the plan will need to have more training than others. Training should include communicating pieces of the plan to the entire congregation (via signs, maps, bulletins, announcements, etc.).