

School Safety and Emergency Management

Monthly Minute: Before School Begins

August 2026

Monthly Minute is a newsletter providing insight and tips on potential threats and hazards brought to you by the Oregon Department of Education.

Your front office just received a call saying that your area is now under a **level two evacuation** notice due to wildfires in the area. The local news is running on the office television. Images of soot-covered firefighters are interspersed with reporters shouting into microphones—glowing hills in the background. Then the map is shown with a red line that looks closer than it did when the bell first rang that morning. A thousand questions are running through your head. You might have answers to most of them if you had recognized this hazard—and planned for it—before the school year began.

We always plan for the year ahead before it begins. There are lesson plans, plans for bus routes, class schedule planning, and yes, safety planning. But before planning begins, we must know what we are planning for.

Threats and hazards should first be identified by determining the occurrence and whether it is likely to occur again based on historical information and subject matter expertise. If you live in a 500-year flood zone, you may be less inclined to dedicate a significant amount of time planning to mitigate flood damage than if you were in a 100-year flood zone.



BE SET

**BE SET TO EVACUATE
AT A MOMENT'S NOTICE**
SIGNIFICANT DANGER IN THE AREA

-  *Follow your evacuation plan & grab your go-kit.*
-  *Check news & radio for updates.*
-  *Conditions change rapidly. Leave if you feel unsafe.*



Conversely, if you are located at a higher elevation, you may be more concerned with landslides than high waters. We don't have unlimited time. So, first identify the threats and hazards that are most likely and then we can determine risk.

A risk assessment of the identified threats and hazards should consider a few different things to determine priority: how likely the event is to occur; how significant the event could be (consequence); and how much warning you are likely to get; and in some cases, how long the event will have an impact.

The consequence, or severity of an event is the next consideration. How deadly is the threat and how much damage could it do to our buildings or grounds?

With proper warning, like we have in our introductory example, you may be able to safely reunite every student on your school grounds. A disaster with no warning could cause significantly more damage than one with warning. One way to help mitigate loss of life and damage to our facilities is by connecting with our emergency response partners and paying attention to the alerts they put out.

(continued on next page)

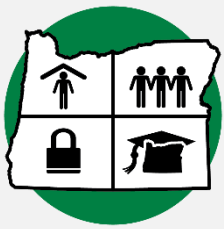
Up Next... September's Monthly Minute will cover "Beginning of the Year Considerations: Safety Drills." What to do and how to get your school community focused on safety right away!



Conduct a Lockdown drill in September.



Conduct an Evacuation drill in September.



School Safety and Emergency Management

Monthly Minute: Before School Begins

August 2026

Below is an example scoring matrix and is taken from the template available on ODE's website for School Safety and Emergency Management.

Emergency Incident Risk Assessment Scoring

Potential Event	Warning Preceding Event	Consequences or Significance	Likelihood/Probability	Risk Level
Cascadia earthquake	None	Catastrophic	Possible	High
Building Fire	10 minutes	Critical	Possible	Medium
HAZMAT Spill on freeway	30 minutes	Limited	Unlikely	Negligible
Snowstorm	1 day	Negligible	Highly Likely	Medium
Wildfire	6-12 hours	Critical	Likely	High
Active Shooter	None	Catastrophic	Unlikely	Medium
				No Risk

(continued from previous page)

The following are some additional considerations before the school year begins:

- Conduct a review of your EOP and the associated emergency drills with your staff.
- Determine your first aid training requirements for your staff: at least one staff member with a current first aid card for every 60 students or an emergency response team per building of no less than six persons who hold current first aid cards.
- Conduct training specific to support staff. Consider individual roles and responsibilities during an

emergency: who shuts off the boiler or closes outside ventilation during a shelter in place drill? Who checks locked exterior doors during a secure drill?

- Consider conducting **a table-top exercise** for your upcoming drills.
- Review and update your memorandums of understanding/agreement with community partners. Are your reunification sites ready and able to accommodate your school?
- Update your **Personal Emergency Accommodation Plans (PEAP)** and special drill procedures for your access and functional needs students.

Contact Information



Scan or click the QR code to visit the School Safety and Emergency Management website with additional school emergency preparedness resources, and to **sign up for the monthly training** and technical assistance sessions.

Resources

Visit our **EOP resources page** to find a risk assessment tool, a fillable PEAP, emergency planning guidance and other resources to help your district before school begins.

REMS: **Understanding the Situation**

Oregon Emergency Management **local contacts list**