School Safety and Emergency Management

Monthly Minute: Response Priorities December 2026

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



Schools conduct drills so that students and staff become familiar with emergency procedures *before* they are needed. Facing a real emergency, however, can be disorienting. When we see smoke, it is easy to know that we must evacuate. When the ground starts shaking, we know that we must follow our earthquake procedures. But what happens when there is only a potential threat of danger such as a suspicious person pacing back and forth in the school parking lot? Or if that same suspicious person has made their way into the building? Threats that are not active—meaning, they are not currently disruptive or violent—could be difficult to assess. This does not mean that every person in sight of school grounds should be treated suspiciously, but it does mean that suspicious behavior should cause us to consider protective measures before they are needed. A **Hold** or a **Secure** protocol could be useful to give time to assess suspicious activity or prevent unwanted intrusion.

The most important action to take before all others in response to a potential threat or hazard is to set the conditions for safety with a response protocol. A fire requires an evacuation immediately. An earthquake requires everyone to **drop, cover and hold on**—or **move to shelter** in spaces without adequate cover from falling debris. A threat identified (or suspected) inside the building requires a **lockdown**. When danger is present, we must first set the conditions for the safety of everyone in the building. The very next thing to do is to call for help.

In each scenario listed above, emergency responders should be notified immediately after announcing the appropriate **Standard Response Protocol** (drill) that will make everyone safe in the presence of danger. This is because it will take time to both notify and get fire and police responders moving in the direction of the school. Every minute that we wait to dial 911 could be the difference-maker for someone requiring lifesaving treatment, or it could prevent a crime that could hurt others. Call 911 immediately after a response has been initiated.

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This Month… Conduct a Hold drill this month. Review response procedures and have a checklist available for front office staff that covers those priorities.

Up Next… January's Monthly Minute will cover medical emergencies and how to prepare and respond when the unexpected results in injury.

Hold! in your room or area. Clear the halls.

Conduct a **Shelter Drill** for **earthquakes** in January.

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Test Your School's Response Procedures

Table-top or scenario-based exercises are invaluable activities that reinforce response priorities and build confidence in the decision-making necessary during a real emergency. For December, conduct a table-top exercise (TTX) that would have the school respond to a severe winter storm.

Severe winter storm TTX document

School EOP Resources Page with additional TTXs



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The front office is most often responsible for initiating and coordinating a response. Front office staff should all understand the procedures necessary to respond to any given emergency: announce the appropriate response (Lockdown, Shelter, Evacuate, etc.), then call emergency services (911), then follow through on the other coordinating measures such as notifying district staff, taking accountability, and communicating with parents and guardians.

Remember to use the required drills to reinforce the need for appropriate response procedures. Simply going through the motions during a scheduled drill could result in indifference or indecision when faced with a real emergency. Have a checklist in the front office that covers the following:

- Announce the necessary Standard Response Protocol (Hold, Secure, Lockdown, Evacuate, or Shelter).
- Call 911.
- Continue the necessary response and notify the district office of the event.
- Take accountability of all students and staff.
- Decide on further action necessary to maintain the safety of the school.
- Follow the district **communications plan** and notify parents and guardians about what is happening and what they should do.

Connect with us for assistance on establishing response priorities or other school safety needs.

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

Go to our EOP Resources page for help on this and to find an example communications plan and scenario-based exercises.

SSEM: Emergency Plans and Drills guidance, including communication plan considerations.

Oregon Emergency Management local contacts list.