



School Safety and Emergency Management

Monthly Minute: Special Event Planning

May 2026

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



Teachers and students alike are watching the clock as the year winds down. Graduation is in sight and that means students get to show off their accomplishments on stage in front of a large crowd of cheering spectators. School administrators are busy checking credits, planning their speeches and making sure they have enough seating for families and supporters. Just remember that safety is the first consideration when planning a successful event.

Just like with the school Emergency Operations Plan (EOP), special event planning should start with the **assembly of a planning team**. Key people, such as family groups or representatives, student leaders, teachers, school nurses, security and first responders should be included in planning for large and special events.

The challenges for ensuring safety increase as the size of the group increases. The stakeholders identified above are necessary to answer these questions and others when planning for special events. Identifying the needs of all attendees may not be possible, but the planning team should deliberately plan for attendees who may have **access and functional needs** such as mobility restrictions, communication barriers or other medical conditions.

During the planning process, be sure to incorporate the **Incident Command System (ICS)** fundamentals in the event plan to improve organization and adaptability in case of an emergency. Clearly identify the leader of the event and ensure that they have an appropriate span of control. No more than three to seven people should be reporting to any one person. Further, every person helping to run the event should only be reporting to one supervisor to avoid conflicting instructions. Use common language that can be understood by others when planning and running the event.

Consider if the graduation is being held outside on an athletic field—or even inside a poorly ventilated gymnasium. Everyone is susceptible to heat-related illness if appropriate shade, water or other cooling measures are not available. Be sure to stage EMTs or

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This Month... Conduct a Shelter! Drill. Consider poor air quality conditions ahead of wildfire season and practice sealing up the building to prevent smoke inhalation.



Conduct a Shelter-in-Place Drill in May.

Up Next... June's Monthly Minute will address wildfire safety and things you can do to mitigate your vulnerability to wildfires. Conduct an Evacuate! Drill in June.



Conduct an Evacuate! Drill in June.



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Preparing for Summer

Now is the time to prepare for the hot summer months and the threat of wildfires or other environmental hazards. First, make sure that brush is cut back from the building and that roofs and gutters are clean of debris. Clear defensible space is necessary to mitigate the potential of spreading wildfires.

- **Visit the Oregon State Fire Marshal page on creating defensible space.**



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other first aid trained people to help others as needed. Ensure AEDs are located nearby in case they are needed.

Communicate the necessary details of the plan and the event with prospective attendees well ahead of the event. Early communication should include expectations of attendees, how to access the event and how to gain accessibility assistance if needed. For instance, if ushers are needed for mobility assistance, how can an attendee get that assistance?

The planning team's job is not done at the conclusion of the event. Be sure to schedule a follow-up meeting to discuss what went right, what needs were not met, and how the event can be run better and safer next

year. Capture those notes and include them in the planning for future events.

Additional considerations for special event planning:

- Communicate, communicate, communicate! Let attendees know what to expect ahead of time and use signage, ushers and security staff to direct traffic and manage expectations.
- Deliberately plan for response to a medical emergency. Responsible staff should be identified ahead of time with trauma kits and AEDs readily available.
- In warmer weather, make sure to have water, shade and cooling locations available to prevent and treat heat-related illnesses.
- Don't forget to review the event with the planning team after it concludes. Next year's event depends on it!

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

Emergency Plans and Drills Guidance: **Community Collaboration.**

Emergency Plans and Drills Guidance: **Access and Functional Needs.**

Emergency Plans and Drills Guidance: **Incident Command System for Schools.**

Oregon Emergency Management **local contacts list.**