



Health and Safety

for congregations

Emergency planning

How this guide can help you

The actions taken in the minutes following an emergency are critical. Emergencies can occur at any time without warning. Preventing emergencies and promptly warning people to evacuate, shelter or lockdown can save lives. Being prepared also means that panic and confusion are minimised.

Note: lockdown is a measure taken during an emergency to prevent people from leaving or entering a building.

In this section you will learn:

- What is an emergency plan
- How to develop an emergency plan
- How to plan or conduct evacuations and lockdowns
- Emergency equipment
- Training and instruction
- Emergency testing
- Reviewing emergency plans
- When children are involved

The practical tools you will find:

- Sample emergency plan

What is an emergency plan and what should be included

An emergency plan is a written set of instructions outlining what staff, contractors, volunteers and others should do in an emergency. An emergency plan template can be found **here**. An emergency plan must include:

- Emergency procedures
- Information, training and instruction arrangements for staff, volunteers and contractors
- Evacuation procedures
- Processes for providing first aid and immediate assistance to people in the vicinity
- Effective communication mechanisms between the person nominated to coordinate the emergency response and other people there
- The process for alerting emergency services
- Testing of the emergency procedures (including frequency)

It can also be helpful to include:

- Names and contact details for people with assigned roles in an emergency such as, first aid officers/ coordinators, fire wardens, emergency coordinators.





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What is an emergency plan and what should be included cont...

- Contact details for local emergency services, for example police, fire brigade and the poison information centre
- A map of any buildings, illustrating the location of fire protection equipment, emergency exits and assembly points
- The post-incident follow-up process, for example notifying the safety regulator of a notifiable incident, organising trauma counselling or medical treatment
- Evacuation procedures for assisting people with hearing, vision or mobility impairments
- Triggers and processes for advising neighbouring businesses about emergencies

Developing an emergency response plan

Emergency plans do not necessarily have to be lengthy or complex. They should however be easy to understand and tailored to the specific locations to which they apply. To get started, you should identify potential emergency scenarios that could occur in your congregation. The emergency plan should be based on a practical assessment of hazards associated with the work and activities performed by the congregation.

External hazards should also be considered in preparing an emergency plan, for example if a chemical storage facility is across the road, an understanding of what could happen will enable you to determine the resource requirements and help to develop plans and procedures to ensure you are prepared.

To get you started, we have developed some sample emergency procedures for common emergencies. Click on the emergency below to be directed to some helpful links.

- **Medical emergency**
- **Building fire**
- **Bushfire**
- **Security**
- **Customer or visitor aggression**
- **Lockdown**
- **Severe weather event**

Note: Some emergency incidents are notifiable. See the relevant Incident and Injury Reporting and Notification Guide for NSW found **here** and for ACT found **here**.

Evacuations

When there is a hazardous situation within the building such as a fire or a bomb threat, occupants should be evacuated or relocated to safety. Prompt evacuation requires a warning system that can be heard throughout the building. Test your fire alarm system to determine if it can be heard everywhere. If there is no fire alarm system, or for other types of emergencies use air horns, microphones or another way to warn everyone to evacuate. Sound the evacuation signal during planned drills so everyone is familiar with the sound. A sample procedure for emergency evacuation can be found **here**.

When determining emergency routes, you should:

- Make sure that sufficient exits are available at all times. Ensure primary and secondary evacuation routes and emergency exits are designated from every floor of the building.



Evacuations (continued)

Walk around the building and verify that exits are marked with exit signs and there is sufficient lighting so people can safely find an exit. If you find that anything blocks an exit, have it removed.

You should also ensure that emergency evacuation routes are wide enough to accommodate the number of people evacuating and not likely to expose people to additional hazards.

You should appoint an emergency coordinator who will take the lead during an emergency and during emergency drills. The emergency coordinator should also direct people to the nearest safe exit and towards the assembly point. You should also make sure someone else knows how to fulfil the role of the emergency coordinator if the primary emergency coordinator is away. It is also important to establish procedures for assisting people with disability and those who do not speak English. It is important to assign 'buddies' to assist people with impaired mobility or capacity to evacuate during an emergency.

Once it appears as though everyone has evacuated, it is also important for the emergency coordinator to ensure everyone has safely evacuated by accounting for everyone. Systems should be established. Consider how you would access important personal information about staff, contractors and volunteers in an emergency (for example, contact numbers for their home and next-of-kin).

Training and instruction

Staff, contractors and volunteers must be adequately trained in emergency procedures. Arrangements for information, training and instruction must also be set out in the emergency plan. It is important to train your staff and regular attendees about the types of emergencies that may occur and how they should respond in emergency situations.

Ensure they understand:

Who will be coordinating the emergency response

Where to find emergency telephone numbers

The evacuation procedures

Designated assembly points

When determining training requirements, you should consider:

How you will train new people

How you will provide refresher training (this should occur at least annually)

How you will provide training for short-term contractors, volunteers or visitors at the workplace (this may not need to be as extensive as may be required for staff members)

You may also wish to consider specific training for individuals who have a formal role in an emergency. For example fire wardens, emergency coordinators and first aid officers/coordinators. Whilst training for emergency coordinators or fire wardens is not legally required, training can help ensure those coordinating activities are confident in their role. This can help avoid confusion and panic if emergencies arise.

Testing emergency procedures

Once you have your emergency plan in place, and have trained your staff and others, test it at least annually. This will show you if it works well or if amendments are needed. Performing additional emergency drills on a Sunday will also help ensure your emergency plan is suitable for a number of visitors. Debriefing after an emergency drill will allow you to revise the plan. Documentation about how the emergency drill went should be kept following the drill.

When children are in our care and away from their parents, emergency and evacuation procedures should be rehearsed every 3 months. All children, and the relevant volunteers and staff present must participate at the time of the rehearsal.

Reviewing emergency plans

For emergency plans to remain current and effective they must be reviewed and revised (if necessary) on a regular basis. An emergency plan should be reviewed:

■ When there are changes, such as re-location or refurbishments

■ When new activities are introduced

■ After the plan has been tested

Emergency equipment

You will need emergency equipment appropriate to the potential emergency scenarios you identify in your emergency plan. Not all fire extinguishers are appropriate for every emergency. Emergency equipment needs to be located where it's readily accessible in the event of an emergency. Use signage so people can see where the equipment is kept.

Make sure your emergency equipment is tagged, regularly inspected and maintained. Testing and tagging of fire extinguishers or hoses should occur every 6 months.

When children are involved

When children are in our care and away from their parents, we need to ensure the emergency plan is relevant to children. When children are involved, the emergency plan should also cater for additional emergency situations relevant to children such as:

■ **Missing child**

■ **Management of medical conditions in children**

■ **Administration of medication to children**

Click on the link above to be taken to sample procedures you can add to your emergency plan. The emergency plan relating to children must include information about communication methods for contacting parents and reconnecting children with their parents. The communication device used must be capable of making and receiving calls without interruption or delay.

It can be a fixed-line telephone, mobile phone, satellite phone, two-way radio, or video conferencing equipment. Where a fixed-line telephone or mobile phone is used, a direct number to and from the service must be available to parents and emergency services for immediate contact at all times that children are attending the service. It is important to consider how you might access the means of communications without leaving children unsupervised for long periods of time.

Support for staff

Providing support for staff after an emergency can be helpful. Counselling services are available via our Employee Assistance Program.

A brochure with contact details for Benestar can be found **here**.

Resources

To assist you develop your emergency plan, a sample can be found **here**.