



OREGON Fire Marshals ASSOCIATION

OREGON FIRE CODE

Interpretations and Technical Advisories

A collaborative service to provide consistent and concise application of Oregon's fire prevention and life safety regulations.

Date: September 28, 2020

Ruling: Technical Advisory No. 20-15

Subject: Evacuation Drills During Pandemic

Code Reference: 2019 Oregon Fire Code (OFC)

Subject: Guidance on evacuation and safety drills
(some examples, not inclusive list: earthquake, fire, lockdown drills)

Contents: For the purposes of this technical advisory, the following shall apply: The Oregon State Fire Marshal's Office (OSFM), Oregon Fire Marshal's Association (OFMA) with consultation from Oregon Department of Education (ODE) have developed and provided information to assist with guidance and resources for a smooth and safe transition back to school within the pandemic environment.

Preparing to return within the pandemic environment may be challenging for school personnel as reentry procedures are continuously being reviewed and revised. To ensure all students enjoy a safe and smooth transition, the process of preparation must continue to include planning for all potential threats and hazards. Drills and exercises are vital components in preparing for potential emergencies and can be safely conducted regardless of pandemic-related restrictions.

The following guidance comes after consultation with our stakeholders for conducting safe and practical drills and exercises by modifying procedures or incorporating other methods. There are many different circumstances as it relates to the pandemic. Depending on the location, a school may or may not have the same concerns regarding contact or community spread as those in other areas, therefore all schools are encouraged to evaluate these considerations in a collaborative review with local stakeholders (i.e. emergency services, health departments and other key organizations) and determine how the guidelines should be applied. Inviting emergency responders to observe and/or participate in all drills is highly encouraged.

Fire code officials are encouraged to work collaboratively with their local schools to determine reasonable requirements. OFC 104.8 and ORS 476.035 give fire code officials the authority to collaborate and come up with safe alternatives when there are practical difficulties in meeting the letter of the code.

Fire Drills: Requirements and Modifications in a COVID-19 Environment:

(Interpreted from 2019 Oregon Fire Code, Sections 403 and 405)

- Drills shall be completed as schools resumes in-person or hybrid instruction models. The first drill should be completed within the first 10 days of resuming school and monthly thereafter.
- Depending on the schedule, a school may need to conduct multiple drills each month to ensure that all cohorts of students have the opportunity to participate in drills.
- Drills shall be conducted at unexpected times and during varying conditions.
- Drills can and should be conducted as close as possible to the way they would be conducted in a real emergency. If the school has a fire alarm system, the drill must be initiated by activation of the fire alarm system.
- False alarms of the fire alarm system may not be substituted for a required evacuation drill.
- Closely monitor points along evacuation routes to limit congestion.
- Point out common staging areas for emergency response vehicles and explain possible avenues of approach.
- Expand rally points to accommodate distancing and staging for handwash/sanitizing stations.
- Provide training to staff on all safety drills prior to students arriving on the first day of school in a hybrid or in-person school setting.

Recommendations

- **Include and work with your local emergency personnel to review your emergency evacuation plans and rally points along with the fire drill schedule.**
- Communicate with families about upcoming safety drills (without giving specific times and dates) and after the safety drills so that families can prepare for, process and review drills at home.
- For schools using a Comprehensive Distance Learning or hybrid model, consider a virtual fire drill with families to practice home evacuation drills. This could include a home fire escape plan knowing 2 ways out of their room, along with having a family meeting place outside in front of their home. In addition, what number to call for an emergency and knowing their address could also be discussed.

Safety Threat Drills:

At least two drills shall be conducted each year. ORS 336.071

Lockdown drills are conducted as a response to safety threats such as “active shooters,” dangerous intruders or incidents presenting a potential danger to the school community.

Modifications might include:

- Increasing number of table-top exercises with staff to ensure procedures are understood.
- Explaining procedures to students and staff with visual aids.
- Practicing procedures to move small groups to safe locations (if applicable) while emphasizing appropriate personal physical distance.
- Wearing masks may be appropriate if concern of infection is elevated.
- Staging wash/sanitizing stations at safe locations and directing students to wash/sanitize hands prior to returning to rooms. Ensure social distancing measures so students do not gather around stations.
- Recording (with video) drills conducted by staff and emergency services using limited number of actors and utilizing video to educate students in procedures.

Earthquake Drills:

At least two drills shall be conducted each year. ORS 336.071

Practicing a safe and timely response in the event of an earthquake. Modifications may include:

- Explaining procedures to students and staff with visual aids.
- Walking through evacuation procedure with small groups. Wearing face coverings may be appropriate if concern of infection is elevated.
- Expanding rally points, staging wash/sanitizing stations and directing students to wash/sanitize hands prior to returning to classrooms. Ensure social distancing measures at wash/sanitizing stations.

Online Fire and Life Safety Resources:

There are several online resources beneficial for school district employees and their students and families.

<https://www.oregon.gov/osp/programs/sfm/Pages/School-Curricula.aspx> (School Programs)

<https://www.nfpa.org/Public-Education/Teaching-tools>

<http://www.sparky.org>

<https://www.shakeout.org/oregon>

<https://www.oregon.gov/ode/students-and-family/healthsafety/Pages/COVID19.aspx>

Other Resources and References:

Oregon State Fire Marshal's Office "Do the Drill"

Oregon Department of Education Ready Schools, Safe Learners

Department of Public Safety (Colorado)

Missouri School Board Association

"I Love U Guys" foundation