

# Emergency Drill White Paper for Public & Charter Schools

Based on the 2021 International Fire Code

## Alaska Division of Fire & Life Safety



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Fire Evacuation, and Lockdown drills are a vital component in preparing our students, teachers, and staff for potential emergencies. With the recent adoption of the 2021 edition of the International Fire Code (IFC), the Division of Fire & Life Safety is providing this paper to clarify the requirements for school fire safety plans, fire evacuation plans, and lockdown plans.

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Each school shall have a specific plan (Fire Safety, Fire Evacuation, and Lockdown), developed in consultation with appropriate fire and law enforcement officials, on how to best respond to emergency incidents.

*It should be noted that there are provisions for “defend-in- place” strategies in the fire code and that these are typically reserved for situations such as a nursing home, hospital, jail, or correctional facility where the occupants are generally considered limited in the ability to self-rescue or evacuate.*

This is rarely the case with schools. *If your school requires considerations under a defend-in-place strategy, you should consult with your local Fire Code Official prior to implementing any special evacuation strategies beyond those discussed in this document.* Actionable responsibility is that upon activation of the fire alarm **all** occupants of a school begin their evacuation of the building unless specifically directed otherwise by a school administrator or responding fire dept. personnel.

The State of Alaska has adopted the 2021 edition of the International Fire Code with Amendments, these documents are applicable to every public school in the State. This edition of the adopted Fire Code and Amendments require all public schools to conduct a fire drill within ten days of the first day of school, and once a month thereafter.

*The only code exception is locations of severe climate. Of which then the local fire code official may modify termination points and frequency of fire evacuation drills.*

*The Code does not allow for the substitution of any other type of drill (e.g., lockdown, secure, or shelter) for a fire drill.*

The following is a comparison of the actions that need to be taken upon an alarm notification:

1. If the fire alarm activates and there are no specific threats against the school or individuals, **evacuate immediately** upon the alarm sounding. While evacuating, maintain situational awareness of other potential dangers.
2. Should the fire alarm activate while the school is on **lockdown** it may not be appropriate to evacuate immediately, and administration should immediately convey direction to staff if normal evacuation is being delayed or redirected. In such circumstances and if safe to do so, appropriate staff should identify the source of the alarm activation to determine cause of activation. Administration and/or the emergency responders who initiated the lockdown may use the intercom, public address system, or voice evacuation command center microphone to direct evacuation, as appropriate. Faculty and students may need to remain in their lockdown awaiting additional direction. However, if smoke or other evidence of fire is present, individual staff are encouraged to evaluate the situation. If it is believed that the threat from fire is more immediate than the danger from the external threat, staff are encouraged to evacuate. Consider other means to evacuate – such as windows – as appropriate.

## FIRE SAFETY PLANS

Fire safety plans shall include the following:

1. The procedure for reporting a fire or other emergency.
2. The life safety strategy including the following:
  - Procedures for notifying occupants, including areas with a private mode alarm system.
  - Procedures for occupants under a defend-in-place response.
  - Procedures for evacuating occupants, including those who need evacuation assistance.
3. Site plans indicating the following:
  - The occupancy assembly points.
  - The locations of fire hydrants.
  - The normal routes of fire department vehicle access.
4. Floor plans identifying the locations of the following:
  - *Exits*.
  - Primary evacuation routes.
  - Secondary evacuation routes.
  - Accessible egress routes.
    - Areas of refuge.
    - Exterior areas for assisted rescue.
  - Refuge areas associated with *smoke barriers* and *horizontal exits*.
  - Manual fire alarm boxes.
  - Portable fire extinguishers.
  - Occupant-use hose stations.
  - Fire alarm annunciators and controls.
5. A list of major fire hazards associated with the normal use and occupancy of the premises, including maintenance and housekeeping procedures.
6. Identification and assignment of personnel responsible for maintenance of systems and equipment installed to prevent or control fires.
7. Identification and assignment of personnel responsible for maintenance, housekeeping and controlling fuel hazard sources.

## **FIRE EVACUATION PLANS**

Fire evacuation plans shall include the following:

1. Emergency egress or escape routes and whether evacuation of the building is to be complete by selected floors or areas only or with a defend-in-place response.
2. Procedures for employees who must remain to operate critical equipment before evacuating.
3. Procedures for the use of elevators to evacuate the building where occupant evacuation elevators complying with Section 3008 of the *International Building Code* are included.
4. Procedures for assisting persons unable to use the general *means of egress* unassisted.
5. Procedures for accounting of employees and occupants after evacuation has been completed.
6. Identification and assignment of personnel responsible for rescue or emergency medical aid, if applicable.
7. The primary and alternate means of notifying occupants of a fire or emergency.
8. The preferred and alternate means of reporting fires and other emergencies to the fire department or designated emergency response organization.
9. Identification and assignment of personnel who can be contacted for further information or explanation of duties under the plan.
10. A description of the emergency voice/alarm communication system alert tone and preprogrammed voice messages, where provided.

## MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS FOR FIRE DRILLS

- The first Fire Drill of the school year shall be conducted within the first ten (10) school days of the year.
- Schools must conduct at least one physical evacuation drill **each month**.
- Fire Drills shall be conducted at unexpected times and under varying conditions each month and shall include all occupants (i.e., during different class periods, during lunch, or between class periods).
- Where a school has a Fire Alarm system, Fire Drills shall be initiated using the Fire Alarm system.
- All-Hazard Drills such as Lock-Down, Lock-Out, natural disaster, HAZMAT, or Other Drills **shall not** replace the required monthly fire evacuation requirement.
- False alarms of the fire alarm system **may not** be substituted for a required evacuation drill.

### **Lockdown plans to Comply with Fire Codes.**

Lockdown plans shall include the following:

1. Identification of individuals authorized to issue a lockdown order.
2. Security measures used during normal operations, when the building is occupied, that could adversely affect egress or fire department operations.
3. A description of identified emergency and security threats addressed by the plan, including specific lockdown procedures to be implemented for each threat condition.
4. Means and methods of initiating a lockdown plan for each threat, including:
  - The means of notifying occupants of a lockdown event which shall be distinct from the fire alarm signal.
  - Identification of each door or other access point that will be secured.
  - A description of the means or methods used to secure doors and other access points.
  - A description of how locking means and methods are in compliance with the requirements of this code for egress and accessibility.
5. Procedures for reporting to the fire department any lockdown condition affecting egress or fire department operations.
6. Procedures for determining and reporting the presence or absence of occupants to emergency response agencies during a lockdown.
7. Means for providing two-way communication between a central location and each area subject to being secured during a lockdown.
8. Identification of the prearranged signal for terminating the lockdown.
9. Identification of individuals authorized to issue a lockdown termination order.
10. Procedures for unlocking doors and verifying that the *means of egress* has been returned to normal operations upon termination of the lockdown.
11. Training procedures and frequency of lockdown plan drills.

Lockdown plan drills shall be conducted in accordance with the *approved* plan. Such drills shall not be substituted for fire and evacuation drills.

### **Active Shooter/Dangerous Intruder Lockdown Drills to Comply with Fire Codes:**

- Lockdown, secure, or shelter drills could be conducted as a response to “active shooters,” dangerous intruders or incidents presenting a potential danger to the school community.

In addition to full scale school-wide drills, other forms of training and familiarization exercises for these kind of emergencies might include:

- Table-top exercises with staff to ensure procedures are understood.
  - Explaining procedures to students and staff with visual aids.
  - Conducting small drills with smaller groups of students/staff.
  - Practicing procedures to move small groups to safe locations (if applicable)
  - Recording (with video) drills conducted by staff and emergency services using limited number of actors and utilizing video to educate students in procedures.
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- Upon activation of a fire alarm signal, employees or staff shall immediately notify the fire department.
  - No person shall, by verbal or written directive, require any delay in the reporting of a fire to the fire department.

### Recordkeeping.

Records shall be maintained of required emergency evacuation drills and include the following information:

1. Identity of the person conducting the drill.
2. Date and time of the drill.
3. Notification method used.
4. Employees on duty and participating.
5. Number of occupants evacuated.
6. Special conditions simulated.
7. Problems encountered.
8. Weather conditions when occupants were evacuated.
9. Time required to accomplish complete evacuation.

- Fire safety, evacuation and lockdown plans shall be **reviewed and updated** annually or as necessitated by changes in staff assignments, occupancy, or the physical arrangement of the building.

- Fire safety, evacuation and lockdown plans shall be available in the workplace for reference and review by employees, with copies furnished to the fire code official for review upon request.

— Lockdown plans shall only be permitted where such plans are approved by the fire code official.

We are here to help...

As the designated Authority Having Jurisdiction (AHJ) for the fire codes adopted by the State of Alaska, the Division of Fire & Life Safety stands ready to assist school officials and local fire department staff in developing, evaluating, and maintaining the required safety plans for their schools, regardless of Deferral status. Please feel free to reach out to the Division at (907) 269-5511.