



Emergency Preparedness and Response Planning for State/Territory Licensing Agencies

Creating emergency preparedness and response (EPR) plans can lessen the impact an emergency or disaster has on child care, including child care licensing. EPR plans should specify how the licensing agency will continue to operate in an event of an emergency or disaster. These plans should also specify how the agency will continue to administer the licensing program and prevent disruption in services. By conducting hazard assessments, State/Territory child care licensing administrators can identify the different types of hazards (e.g., natural disasters, outbreaks, severe weather, accidental/technical hazards, and/or terrorist attacks) that may affect the State/Territory and respond accordingly in their EPR plans.

This document is designed to help child care licensing administrators create emergency plans for their agencies. It provides guidance, questions, and additional resources to help States/Territories consider how the licensing agency will operate (e.g., communicate with staff, access data, and establish alternate work sites) and/or administer the licensing program (e.g., communicate with child care providers, waive licensing requirements, respond to the establishment of temporary facilities). Additional resources related to emergency preparedness are available on the Office of Child Care (OCC), Child Care Resources for Disasters and Emergencies section of the Web at

<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/occ/resource/child-care-resources-for-disasters-and-emergencies>.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) also offers resources in other languages at <http://www.fema.gov/all-languages>.

Operation of Child Care Licensing Agency

After an emergency or disaster, agency staff need to know what to do in order to continue the operation of the agency (e.g., communication with the agency and/or other staff about their status, responsibilities on reporting to work, and new duties to help with recovery). The licensing administrator may also want to specify how the agency will provide mission essential functions (e.g., delegate authority, communication, alternate facilities/locations, and recovery) in their emergency plans*. In developing their EPR plans, licensing administrators may want to consider:

- Maintaining home and cell phone numbers for all staff. In EPR plans, licensing administrators may want to specify that when licensing staff are unable to travel to their office or the office is not open, they should be in contact with their immediate supervisor for further directions/instructions.
- Maintaining “hard copies” of all forms. Program documentation may have to be done manually in situations where electricity is out and staff/agency cannot access data and/or databases. Data must be electronically entered when access is restored.

* These plans are sometimes referred to as Continuity of Operations (COOP) Plans.

Since it is impossible to foresee every event that may occur, the EPR plan should be broad enough to cover widely varied situations. The licensing administrators may also want to consider the following:

- Does your Emergency Management Agency have an emergency operations plan for the State/Territory? If yes, does it align with the continuity of operations plan for the licensing agency?
- Does the operations plan specify how the agency will communicate/provide updates to off-site agency staff, emergency management agency, other State/Territory/local agencies, and the OCC regional office?
- Do the licensing administrators have access to alternative office locations, if the main licensing agency or local offices are damaged?
- Do licensing administrators have back-ups of agency records? If records are maintained by another agency, are there plans in place for how to access them if that agency is damaged or inaccessible? Do licensing administrators have protocols for accessing agency records from alternate sites?

Administration of Licensing Program to Prevent Service Disruption

State/Territory licensing administrators can also formulate administrative policies that help direct child care licensing programs in the event of an emergency or disaster. For example, licensing administrators may want to consider:

- Prescreening individuals (staff and volunteer) interested in working with children during an emergency or disaster or have processes in place to expedite criminal history and background checks. Adults without a completed background check and orientation training should not be left alone with children.
- Temporarily exceeding the facility capacity—based on square footage, number of bathrooms, and outdoor play space—if the number of children in care does not create an unsafe environment and adequate equipment—e.g., cribs, cots— is available.[†]
- Discussing, evaluating, and documenting how the agency will approve abbreviated child and staff records (e.g., missing immunization records) and reasonable, safe alternatives to missing or damaged resources—alternatives such as cell phones, generators, bottled water, gloves, and sanitizing gel for diaper changing—to support facilities.
- Temporarily waiving group size requirements, if necessary.
- Establishing clear approval processes of how facilities can reopen or operate at an alternate location, such as having electricity (or an alternative source of heat and light), a working phone, a working toilet (or port-a-john, if approved by the health department), a fire extinguisher, and access to clean drinking water. Use the director or home provider’s description of the situation and the licensing specialist’s availability to determine whether a site visit is needed prior to issuing approval. Follow-up visits are made as soon as possible.
- Establishing clear guidelines for temporary child care programs not meeting all licensing requirements located in mass shelters. Such as:
 - ◆ Checking children in and out of the facility and keeping accurate attendance records.
 - ◆ Providing developmentally appropriate activities for children that establish routines, which is essential for children who have experienced major disruption in their lives.

[†] This may not be advisable for children in infant care.

- ◆ Supervising children and having at least one qualified child care professional present at the location. An individual must be designated as responsible for the program at all times.

As stated earlier, it is impossible to foresee every event. The plan for the administration of the licensing program should be broad enough to cover all possible outcomes. Licensing administrators may also want to consider the following:

- How will the agency communicate with child care providers affected by the emergency to determine their status and needs?
- How will the agency identify closed facilities? Furthermore, what will be the process to assess facility damage to approve the reopening of facilities (e.g., use of abbreviated fire and health inspections or extend timeframes for the correction of hazards)? How will licensing staff assist providers with determining whether to continue care in the present location? How will the agency work with fire and health officials to inspect facilities that have structural damage or the utilities have been disrupted?
- How will the agency monitor the relocation of children during or after an emergency or disaster?
- How will the agency facilitate the development and approval of temporary child care to keep children safe during and after an emergency or disaster (e.g., care provided at emergency shelters)?
- Will the agency provide resources to help children, parents, and child care providers recover emotionally and financially from the emergency or disaster?

Child care licensing administrators may also want to consider:

- Asking child care resource and referral (CCR&Rs) agencies to help contact providers and stay up-to-date on program status. CCR&Rs agencies may want to take the lead in supporting parents with child care information when their provider has been displaced.
- Allowing State employees, State contractors, and child care providers not able or needed to work in their own program to be recruited to provide assistance at a licensed child care program that is not damaged or is at a temporary location.

Additional Resources

- *Protecting Children in Child Care During Emergencies* (December 2010), by Child Care Aware (formerly known as the National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies) and the Domestic Emergencies Unit, within Save the Children.
http://www.naccrra.org/sites/default/files/publications/naccrra_publications/2012/protectingchildreninchildcareemergencies.pdf
- *Disaster Plan*[‡] (May 2007), by the Division of Child Development & Early Education, North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services.
http://ncchildcare.dhhs.state.nc.us/pdf_forms/dccdis.pdf
- *Acceptable Conditions for Re-Opening of Child Care Facilities Following Flood Damage* (n.d.), by the Bureau of Child Care, Indiana Family and Social Services Administration.
https://secure.in.gov/fssa/files/Flood_Info.pdf

[‡] The 2012 revised version of the disaster plan is not available online.

* The Child Care State Systems Specialist Network does not endorse any non-Federal organization, publication, or resource.