



COLORADO PUBLIC & CHARTER SCHOOL FIRE & EVACUATION DRILL GUIDANCE 2020 - 2021 SCHOOL YEAR

As the Colorado Department of Education and the Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment diligently work to develop and provide guidance and resources to our communities that will help ensure that all students, teachers, staff enjoy a safe and smooth return to our schools in the COVID-19 environment this fall, the process of preparation must continue to include planning for all potential threats and hazards. Fire & Evacuations drills and exercises are a vital component in preparing our students, teachers, and staff for potential emergencies and can be safely conducted regardless of pandemic-related restrictions. The threat of natural and man-made emergencies does not recede just because we are facing new and difficult challenges related to this pandemic; therefore, it is just as important, if not more so, than it has always been to prepare our love ones to respond promptly and adequately to these emergencies.

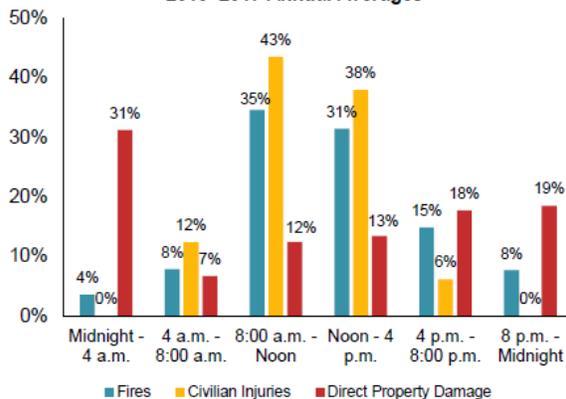
The following guidance, developed in consultation with some of our school safety stakeholders, offer recommendations for conducting safe and practical drills and exercises by slightly modifying procedures or incorporating other methods. This guidance is provided to aid in the support of conducting, at a minimum, the drills and exercises outlined in and required by the State's adopted Codes.

Various regions around the state have different circumstances related to the COVID 19 pandemic. Rural schools may not have the same concerns regarding contact or community spread as those in more populated areas, thus 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 or if the guidelines should be applied. Inviting emergency responders to observe and/or participate in all drills is encouraged. The Colorado Division of Fire Prevention & Control is available to participate in these discussions and our staff are happy to help answer any questions or support any local, regional, or statewide efforts associated with Fire & Evacuations drills and exercises.

Fire Drills:

Fire is the leading emergency that occurs in our schools that requires evacuation drills, which is why continued diligence in preparing for these types of emergencies is imperative. In 2013-2017, which is the most up-to-date and complete data available to us today, U.S. fire departments responded to an estimated average of 3,320 *reported* structure fires in schools each year. These *reported* fires caused annual averages of one civilian death, 42 civilian injuries, and \$42 million in direct property damage. Two-thirds of school fires occurred between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m. - the time of day that school is typically in-session and occupied by our students, teachers, and staff. (Campbell, Richard. *Structure Fires in Schools*. National Fire Protection Association, 2019.)

**Figure 4. Structure Fires in School Properties by Time of Day
 2013–2017 Annual Averages**





Requirements for Fire Drills:

- The first drill of the school year must be conducted within 10-days of the beginning of classes. In order to ensure that all students, teachers, and staff are familiarized with the updated procedures in the COVID-19 environment, all class cohort rotations must conduct a drill within this timeframe.
- Must conduct at least one physical evacuation drill each month. If a drill is not conducted on a particular class cohort rotation for the month, an in-service or other training shall be provided to students, teachers, and staff associated with that rotation to ensure all are being refreshed on drill process and procedure each month. No class cohort rotation shall go more than 60-days without participating in a physical evacuation drill.
- Participation must include all occupants.
- Shall be conducted at unexpected times and during varying conditions.
- 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.

Modifications to support meeting these requirements in the COVID-19 environment might include:

- Scheduling additional time to conduct each drill.
- Practicing evacuation in a slower, more methodical process, while emphasizing appropriate personal physical distance. Wearing masks may be appropriate if concern of infection is elevated.
- Sequencing the release of classrooms in an effort to reduce the number of individuals evacuating at any given time. This may be accomplished through the utilization of available means of communication, evacuation procedures developed in collaboration with the Fire Code Official, or a combination of both.
- Closely monitoring more points along evacuation routes to limit congestion.
- Pointing out common staging areas for emergency response vehicles and explaining possible avenues of approach.
- Expanding rally points to accommodate distancing and staging handwash/sanitizing stations. Directing students to wash/sanitize hands prior to returning to rooms.
- Providing in-services or videos that outline the updated procedures and changes from pre-COVID-19 response as a supplement to the physical evacuation drills.
- Working with the Fire Code Official, identify other potential mechanisms to avoid congestion and "crossing paths."

Active Shooter/Dangerous Intruder Lockdown Drills:

Lockdown drills are conducted as a response to "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.
- Conducting more frequent small drills with smaller groups of students/staff.
- 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:

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 masks may be appropriate if concern of infection is elevated.



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- Expanding rally points, staging wash/sanitizing stations and directing students to wash/sanitize hands prior to returning to classrooms. Ensure social distancing measures so students do not gather around stations.

Tornado Drills:

Conducted prior to severe weather season and designed to practice moving students and staff to a safe location within a building or structure in the event of a tornado or severe weather warning. Modifications might include:

- Scheduling additional time to conduct each drill.
- Explaining procedures during local siren tests.
- Clearly announcing the drill and practicing it in a slower, methodical process while emphasizing appropriate personal physical distance. Wearing masks may be appropriate if concern of infection is elevated.
- Moving students to the shelter location one classroom or group at a time.
- Identifying "one-way" avenues or hallways to reduce congestion and "crossing paths."
- Applying clear signage to identify shelter locations and pointing out signage on a regular basis. Stage wash/sanitizing stations in or near shelter locations. Ensure social distancing measures so students do not gather around stations.
- Directing students to thoroughly wash/sanitize hands prior to returning to rooms.

Bus Evacuation Drills:

Drill conducted in emergency response for passengers and drivers. Modifications may include:

- Conducting the drills in a slower and methodical pace while encouraging personal physical distancing. Wearing masks may be appropriate if concern of infection is elevated.
- Practicing evacuations with a handful of passengers and rotating participants.
- Conducting procedures in a secure parking lot to ensure room for physical distancing.
- Providing sanitizing products for passengers and direct youth to sanitize hands during pre-determined points of the procedures.

A number of other drills may be performed and can be practiced in the COVID-19 environment with the same considerations. Simply allowing students to exercise social distancing during a drill is acceptable as long as they understand the need to react with urgency in an actual emergency, thus requiring extensive vocal reinforcement during any exercise. Working with local emergency services is encouraged to provide insight from practitioners.

Editor's Note: Much of the substance and guidance provided in this document is excerpted from "EMERGENCY DRILL & EXERCISE GUIDANCE," developed and distributed by the Missouri School Boards' Association's Center for Education Safety, in conjunction with their State Fire Marshal's Office.