



Guide for Developing High-Quality Emergency Operations Plans for Institutions of Higher Education

Homeland Security

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Our nation's postsecondary institutions are entrusted to provide a safe and healthy learning environment for students, faculty, and staff who live, work, and study on campus. Faced with emergencies ranging from active shooter situations to fires, tornadoes, floods, hurricanes, earthquakes, and pandemic influenza, this is no easy task. Many of these emergencies occur with little to no warning; therefore, it is critical for institutions of higher education (IHEs) to plan ahead to help ensure the safety and general welfare of all members of the campus community. IHEs face unique challenges in planning for potential emergencies in terms of geography, environment, governance, and the population served. Colleges and universities, including community colleges and technical colleges, are large, small, urban, rural, residential, transient, two-year, four-year, public, and private, and often operate around-the-clock. IHE campuses often span large geographic areas, and many have additional locations in other cities, states, or countries. Many IHEs operate complex enterprises in addition to their academic programs, including hospitals, research and development facilities, performing arts venues, athletic complexes, agricultural centers, residential complexes, and transportation systems. They frequently have open campuses that are integrated into the surrounding community, with visitors regularly on campus touring facilities, attending events, and receiving medical care. Many campuses house sensitive materials and information and sponsor activities and events that increase their vulnerability. It is common for major universities to employ people and establish facilities dedicated to research in areas such as nuclear energy, engineering, biochemistry, medicine, public safety, defense, technology, and intelligence. In addition, many universities house critical research. Major universities also serve as contractors to government agencies such as the Department of Defense, Department of Justice, National Institutes of Health, National Security Agency, and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, as well as to the nation's largest corporations, and thus house important information. Additionally, IHE governance is highly varied and often widely dispersed. Many institutions have decentralized organizational structures and academic departments with differing processes and decision-making responsibilities. In addition, the variance in purpose, structure, authority, and operations among campus police and security agencies makes one-size-fits-all programs and policies impractical. IHEs serve primarily adult students who are capable of making decisions on their own. The campus population is perpetually in flux, changing from day to day, semester to semester, and year to year. Some students commute to and from campus, others attend class virtually, while still others live in housing facilities located on or near the college campus, resulting in a dispersed population. IHEs also often host individuals from other nations. While these characteristics pose challenges, in collaboration with their local government and community partners, IHEs can take steps to plan for these potential emergencies through the creation of a higher education Emergency Operations Plan (higher ed EOP).

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