

## **Personnel Recovery-Setting Up Emergency Day Care Centers** **Gene Tucker, CPP, CFE**

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After a regional disaster we can expect schools to be closed for a number of days to weeks depending on the scope of the event and the amount of damage to individual facilities. While the students may cheer, businesses that depend on the presence of key employees will have difficulty recovering if these employees must remain home to 'baby-sit.' Colleagues and presenters occasionally tell us that the solution is simple: After a disaster, establish an on-site day care center. This may not be as simple as it sounds. Setting up a center takes a fair amount of planning and preparedness.

A major consideration is space and location-two resources in high demand if portions of your facility are damaged. Double this problem by planning for an alternate location. The space selected must be structurally safe and relatively convenient to the worksite. An outside play area is desirable. Consider potential transportation difficulties if the center is not located in your facility. Prioritize cleaning and restoration of the area you intend to use-if it doesn't look and smell clean and safe, parents will be reluctant to leave their children.

Prepare some type of security procedure that includes identification of the parent and child, a sign-in/sign-out log, and good physical security (i.e. containment-don't let future continuity planners crawl under the fence and play on the freeway). Establish a form to record vital information on each child. Include each child's name (duh), a full physical description, home address, emergency contacts other than the employee, names of persons authorized to remove the child from the center, medical information and the name of the child's pediatrician / family doctor, allergies, special needs, etc. Special evacuation and other emergency procedures should be developed and practiced. Include a method to account for children once evacuated. Know how to contact parents within the worksite while their children are at the center.

After you have identified potential staff, conduct your own background investigation on staff members utilizing an investigative firm that specializes in this service. Do this even if the State requires you to submit fingerprints. Look for the obvious things in the staff's history that would exclude participation in the program. Try to keep the child to staff ratio low especially if there is an overabundance of younger children. Ideally (and these are not ideal situations) there should be no more than the following number of children for each adult:

- 3-4 infants or toddlers
- 4-6 two-year-olds
- 7-8 three-year-olds
- 8-9 four-year-olds

- 8-10 five-year-olds
- 10-12 school age children

The best group size is no more than two times the ratio indicated above for any age group. For example, there should be no more than eight in a group of infants, and no more than 20 in a group of five-year-olds. Staff members will ideally be first aid / CPR trained, will have first aid supplies and reference materials available. Orient the staff to the types of behaviors and fears children may have as a result of the disaster (see 'Helping Children Cope with Disaster' at FEMA's web site). Establish a drug policy that requires parents to administer any prescription medications. Train the staff in procedures and expectations. This is much easier if the center's staff is pre-selected. Provide the staff with some form of independent communications-cellular or satellite phone, two-way radio, etc.

Decide what age limits the center is willing to accept. This will greatly affect both the type and amount of resources the center will require. Infant care will necessitate changing tables, added privacy or separation from older kids, more difficult food preparation, sanitary provisions and cribs. Rest /sleep areas may be required. Be certain to not only communicate to employees the existence of the center, but also establish requirements and instructions for them ahead of time. Informing parents to bring necessary items such as milk, bottles, diapers, snacks, bag lunch, books, toys, videos, and more videos will help keep preparation, storage, and other forms of resource management to a minimum. Screen toys and videos brought into the center to ensure they are clean, safe, and will not upset other parents (i.e., toy guns, candy cigarettes). Expensive toys can cause problems if they are lost, stolen, broken by other kids, or cause arguments because they are not shared.

Establish a reasonable time limit for operations. Will the center be staffed for all shifts? Decide how long it should remain open, i.e., two weeks or until schools are back in operation. The duration should be somewhat dynamic, but a solid closure date will make planning easier and encourage employees to make other arrangements.

Work with your insurance broker or risk manager and legal council to discuss what policies are in force to limit any liability. Reimbursement of extra-ordinary expense from the insurance carriers may be available. Have legal draft the appropriate hold harmless agreements in case young Bessie gets a hangnail or the CEO's kid brings in a box of fire ants. Have legal check for any special licenses that may be required (see CA Division 12, Chapters 1-2 – a copy is now in the BRMA library). It does not appear that any licenses are required for temporary, volunteer employee operated centers in California, but I am certainly not an expert on this point.

One way to avoid much of the need for this planning is to identify and pre-qualify commercial centers in the area and / or provide subsidies and reimbursements to parents for their use. This approach may be the most feasible if the number of parents expected to use an on-site center is low (a needs assessment should be completed at some point early in the process). Other sources such as emergency care consortiums and firms that

provide on-call in-home care are available, but could be over-extended subsequent to a regional disaster. If necessary, change company policy to allow children in the workplace (such as your office) if the type of operation does not jeopardize their safety. If feasible, change work schedules to accommodate childcare needs.