



THE **resource**

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE FROM YOUR COALITION

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Planning for the Unexpected

These materials were developed by MCADSV staff.
For more information, contact MCADSV.

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Planning for the Unexpected

Advocates deal with the unexpected and the unplanned every day. It's where we excel. But advance planning and preparation can make even sudden catastrophes easier to address. In this document, we've collected the lessons learned by MCADSV member programs that faced unexpected challenges and will guide you through necessary planning and documentation for your own program.

As much as we would like to create a response that works for every member of MCADSV, it is not possible. Each agency has different resources, community support, and facility infrastructure. Even within your agency, any written response you create can't cover every nuance or possibility, but it gives an employee a place to start. Each topic area will include items for you to consider as you develop your policies.

As you learned in *The Resource: Writing Policies and Procedures*, your policies could include an overall policy statement and then a detailed process that takes an employee or volunteer step-by-step through a proposed, planned response.

Topics in this document will include:

- Flood by natural causes
- Flood by mechanical malfunction
- Tornado or high winds
- Snow and other natural causes that immobilize those at the shelter
- Power outage
- Threat against the shelter
- Armed person on the grounds or in the building
- Bugs and vermin infestations

If there are other situations you would like covered in future documents, please let MCADSV staff know.

Most likely, your insurance carrier will need to be called for a few of these situations. Be sure to know how to reach your agent and what your policies cover. Also consider keeping a copy of your policies off-site in the event you don't have access to your office or the contents of your office are destroyed. Also, it may be necessary to notify any financial institution that holds a lien on the property. If the property has a mortgage or loan on it, the lender may well have its own claims process. Be sure you have this contact information, as well as any necessary mortgage or loan account information for the property affected by an insurance claim.

Advance planning and preparation can make even sudden catastrophes easier to address. In this document, we've collected the lessons learned by MCADSV member programs that faced unexpected challenges and will guide you through necessary planning and documentation for your own program.

As a part of your planning, you may consider how you will notify your community. Contacting the press regarding your temporary closure and how victims can reach out for help will not only show you are thinking about the impact on the community, but also may draw attention to your need for ongoing community support.

Contacting your board's property committee, executive committee or full board also will be on your list of first things to do. Identify your list of immediate contact people and be prepared to designate this responsibility to trusted staff in the event there is too much going on. You will need the help and should be prepared to ask for assistance.

All of the situations discussed in this publication will likely require expert cleaning assistance in some form. Thorough planning would include knowing the contact information for the closest certified biological clean-up specialist. While not all situations will require this extensive type of clean-up, as you read further, you will see that there are incidents that will.

Events that affect a large area leave a lasting impact on a community and its residents. Your services and collaboration with other responders may last into the weeks or months after the event. Prepare now for events by knowing it will take time and resources beyond your daily needs. The emotional and mental drain on your staff could become heightened and the need to address this will be ongoing.

- For further assistance in developing trauma-sensitive skills and responses for aiding your staff, contact MCADSV. Additional resources can be found through the National Center on Trauma Informed Care at www.nasmhpd.org/TA/nctic.aspx.

For any of the situations below, there also should be a plan for handling crisis calls. Talk now with other domestic and sexual violence service providers in your area about forwarding calls to them while you regain your bearings. As a part of your planning, you may consider how you will notify your community. Contacting the press regarding your temporary closure and how victims can reach out for help will not only show you are thinking about the impact on the community, but also may draw attention to your need for ongoing community support.

FLOOD BY NATURAL CAUSES

Missouri is known for its flood seasons and the unpredictably of flash floods. Breached levies and broken dams are a concern every year. Some member programs have had to plan for the reality that their facilities are in the direct path of a potential flash flood. Here are some things they recommend considering:

- If you are in an area near a levy or dam that is at risk for breach, do you know the escape route and time available to move as many people as you might have in shelter?
- Do you have life vests or other rescue devices?
- Have you had contact with local authorities and developed a plan in the event they need to assist with evacuation?
- Who can make the decision to evacuate those seeking services?
- How will transportation be handled?
- What items from your program need to be removed from the offices in order for you to maintain minimal operations? These could include a checkbook, computer with accounting program, access to grant files and resident files for those being evacuated.



FLOOD BY MECHANICAL MALFUNCTION

More than one MCADSV member program has had to confront the flood of broken pipes, water damage and—in one extreme case—a flood of raw sewage. In that case, well, it literally hit the fan. Not only did they have to deal with foul water damage, but also the biological clean-up of a facility that couldn't be entered for weeks.

Another program experienced a pipe break on the second floor, causing water damage throughout the building.

- Do you know where the water shut-off valve is for the building? Is there more than one for different sections of the building?

In both flood scenarios, be cautious and on the lookout for the growth of mold. Many people have allergies to a variety of different mold types, excluding the toxicity of black mold. This too generally requires a specialist to assist you in getting to the source and making sure that clean-up is thorough.

TORNADO OR DAMAGE FROM HIGH WINDS

The experience of the shelter in Joplin during the afternoon of May 22, 2011, had many wondering how they would respond if their community was devastated by a storm of a similar magnitude. While the shelter was not directly damaged during the storm, its response, and the community's, offers a great deal of insight into planning for a severe weather response.

Similar to the floods of 1993, which saw long term increases in service numbers, Joplin's program, Lafayette House, experienced additional needs many months after the tornado. In Lafayette House's experience, the emotional and psychological needs of the community were high, and its role in assisting with crisis response became essential.

Aid workers and rescue personnel are used to dealing with crises, but many people are not. Now the crisis is layered with the trauma of being a victim of violence. Domestic and sexual violence advocates are recognized as leaders in crisis response; therefore, planning for community response to disaster can be a natural fit. This planning and the response can last for months during the rebuilding of the community.

Advocates are called upon by victims who live in the community and those who are providing services to the community. Aid workers and others also are in need of services. In addition, during an environmental crisis, the immediate needs become priority and often the violence people are subjected to becomes critical in the weeks and months following the event. Since Hurricane Katrina, there also is information to suggest that the incidents of sexual assault in emergency housing and shelter increases. This is an additional group of individuals requiring advocacy services and advanced planning to meet the needs of many.

- Do you have designated tornado shelter areas in your facility?
- Are they clearly marked?
- Do you conduct regular drills?

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Advocates went into the community, often door to door, to provide assistance and services to victims until offices and shelters could reopen. Mobile advocacy was the interim remedy to modify services to meet the community's needs at that point in time.

- Do all new residents know the procedure to seek shelter?
- Do you have a severe weather radio?
- Are you prepared for a greater level of demand of both residential and non-residential services?
- Do your local community's mental health providers understand the key role you can play in assisting with your community's recovery?
- Do you know who to call in the event power lines are down? Do you know which lines are power and which are phone? In other words, do you know how to safely navigate around downed power lines?
- Are you a partner in your community's disaster response discussions?
- Do you have a plan for meeting your community where it is? Along the Gulf coast, after Hurricane Katrina, many shelters had been destroyed by flood and/or fire. Advocates went into the community, often door to door, to provide assistance and services to victims until offices and shelters could reopen. Mobile advocacy was the interim remedy to modify services to meet the community's needs at that point in time.

SNOW AND OTHER NATURAL CAUSES THAT IMMOBILIZE THOSE AT THE SHELTER

- Is all shelter staff connected to StormAware through phone and email? StormAware is a system that alerts its users of severe weather. Rarely is there no warning for severe storms. An alert system can help staff prepare for impending severe weather: <http://stormaware.mo.gov/alerts/warning-systems/>. You also can get automatic weather alerts from your local news via text alerts.
- Are there enough essential items at the shelter? Items such as toilet paper and bottled water can be stored indefinitely. Salt to dissolve ice also can be stored indefinitely. Canned goods can be stored for years without going bad. Stocking up is a good idea.
- Does the shelter have a power generator? Ice can be strong enough to take down power lines, leaving shelters without power for weeks.

POWER OUTAGE

- Do you know who to call in the event power lines are down? Do you know which lines are power and which are phone?
- Do you have access to ice and coolers for food storage for a long duration?
- Do you have, at a minimum, flashlights for each family in shelter?
- Are your emergency lights in working order? Do you know how long they will last?
- Are you prepared for long periods without heat or air conditioning?
- Does your security system work when the power goes out? Is the security company contact information easily accessible?

THREAT AGAINST THE SHELTER

Threats against the shelter can require many different responses. Threats could be a chemical spill, gas leak, a fire or a threat of violence against the shelter.

- A chemical spill, gas leak or fire should cause immediate evacuation of the shelter until an all clear is given by emergency personnel. Do you know who to call for a chemical spill, gas leak or fire?
- Does staff know how to use the fire extinguisher? Even if the fire is contained, emergency personnel should be called to inspect the fire area and determine what started the fire and/or the extent of damage and readiness for inhabitability.
- Do you have the contact information of the owners of the building? Do you have the number to the bank if your building has a mortgage? Anyone invested in the building should be contacted about the fire and the damage.
- Are emergency exits highlighted and readable by all staff and residents, day and night? Are the emergency exit signs in multiple languages?
- Death threats and bomb threats require a different response than chemical spills, gas leaks or fires. Immediate contact with police is the first step. Do all employees know what number to call in case of a bomb threat? Let the police guide shelter staff through the bomb threat. Evacuation may be necessary.

ARMED PERSON ON THE GROUNDS OR IN THE BUILDING

It's difficult to prepare for an armed person on the grounds of the facility or inside the building. However, awareness of proper procedure for handling an armed person is important, even if the location of your building is undisclosed. The most important concern is safety.

Prepare against an armed person:

- Are the windows in the shelter bullet-proof? Do all windows have locks?
- Is there a procedure for letting unknown people into the shelter?
- Is there a sign prohibiting weapons inside the shelter? Even if the person is trusted, weapons can stress residents and staff and should be kept out of the shelter.
- Is there a security system in place? Can the security system inform police of an intruder if phones are unavailable?
- Is a lock-down procedure in place? Is this procedure in the employee handbook? Are at least two employees educated on initiating lock-down?
- Is there an annual drill where employees can simulate an armed intruder situation?
- Is there a daily headcount?
- Do you have an intercom system?

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Respond to an armed person on the grounds or in the building:

- Does all staff know how to contact emergency personnel during a crisis? 911 should always be the first number called.
- Is the armed person recognizable? Are they a former employee? An alleged abuser?
- Is there a designated safe room(s) for staff and residents? Are staff and residents educated on when to go to the safe room? Is the room able to accommodate the full capacity of the shelter plus staff? Is the room windowless? Does the room have a lock on the door? Does the room have a phone?

It is important not to engage the armed person. Instead everyone should hide out of view of any windows, lie on the ground with hands raised and silence all cell phones. Do not exit the room until the police issue an all-clear.

BUGS AND VERMIN INFESTATION

Bugs and vermin can be particularly challenging to shelters. Pests such as bedbugs, spiders and mice can be easy to contract but difficult and costly to get rid of. Cool weather drives pests inside shelters, where they thrive in the warm environment. Shelters can take steps to prevent, detect and control pests before the problem becomes too large to handle.

Bedbugs can enter a shelter on used furniture, in suitcases or on donated clothing. Because of their small size and nocturnal feeding time, bedbugs are difficult to detect. It is important to look for signs of bedbugs where humans usually sleep, as in bedrooms and lounge areas.

Policies should be put in place to prevent bedbugs from unwittingly entering the shelter. If bedbugs are detected, call a pest management specialist. Use of pesticides by unskilled individuals can harm residents and also promote the spread of bedbugs. Contracting with a professional is the best option when bedbugs are detected.

- As regular mattresses wear out, replace them with vinyl-covered mattresses that can be wiped clean of bedbugs, eggs and feces.
- Box springs should be encased in special bedbug resistant cloth material or vinyl casing. Repair any holes in vinyl-covered mattresses and box springs with duct tape.
- Metal bedframes are better than wood bedframes if there is an option. If wood is the only option (as with a baby bed), paint the wood white for easier detection of bedbugs.
- All donations should be brought into the shelter in plastic bags (preferably clear). Cardboard boxes can harbor bedbugs and should not be used when at all possible.
- Clothing brought into the shelter should be exposed to hot temperatures, either by baking in the sun or by washing and drying at high temperatures.
- More information on bedbugs can be found here: http://www.healthvermont.gov/prevent/bedbugs/documents/BedBugs_Guidelines_for_Shelters_Group_Living_Facilities.pdf.

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Signs of infestation of bed bugs:

- The first sign of bedbugs is often a red, itchy bite. Pay special attention to when the bites started. Did you just get a used bed or furniture?
- Are there blood stains on your sheets or pillowcases?
- Are there dark or rusty spots on sheets and mattresses, bed clothes, and walls?
- Are there bedbug fecal spots, egg shells, or shed skins in areas where bedbugs hide? Bedbugs often hide in crevices and around seams of mattresses and furniture.
- Do you notice an offensive, musty odor from the bugs' scent glands?

Other insects and vermin usually come into the facility when the weather becomes cooler. Some questions you should ask yourself are listed below. Answering these questions can help prevent or reduce insect and vermin populations.

- Is all food stored in airtight containers? Proper food storage is essential to the prevention of insect and vermin reproduction.
- Are clutter and piles of clothing removed from the floors of the shelter?
- Does your shelter have a vacuum to keep the carpets, rugs and crevices clean? Is it used often? Is the vacuum bag or canister emptied frequently or after each use?
- Are mattresses and box springs inspected before and after residents leave the shelter?
- Is it a policy to inspect all used furniture and clothing items for bugs before bringing the items into the shelter?
- Are residents educated on pests and how to report pest sightings as they enter shelter? Encouraging pest reporting can help keep the pest population under control.
- Do you have sticky traps placed in undisturbed areas of the shelter? Sticky traps can not only catch mice and rats, but other pests, as well.
- Is there an emergency fund in case a pest infestation occurs?
- Does the shelter have a pest management professional chosen? Is the pest management company licensed? Have the pest management professional perform a pre-inspection so they can determine the length of time the shelter will be closed.
- Does your shelter have a protocol for informing your community and partners of any shelter closing?

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Signs of infestation for mice and rats are:

- The first sign of rats and mice is often their droppings. Rat droppings are shiny black, blunt at both ends, and $\frac{1}{2}$ - $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch long. Mice droppings are smooth, with pointed ends, usually about $\frac{1}{8}$ - $\frac{1}{4}$ of an inch long.
- Look for small tracks and tail trails in dusty areas. You may find them in corners, along baseboards, and near sources of food. Smear marks along baseboard and other areas could be rub marks caused by grease and dirt on rat fur.
- Tooth marks are another indication of a rat or mouse present in the shelter. Rat tooth marks are approximately $\frac{1}{8}$ of an inch long. Smaller tooth marks may indicate mice.
- Rats and mice produce a heavy, musky odor. Pay close attention to new odors, especially in areas that are not often used.

Not all emergency scenarios could be covered in this document. Not all considerations are covered either. However, we hope that this at least gives you some ideas for where to start in your own policy development as you plan for the unexpected at your facility.

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