



National
Guidance

oeapng.info

Emergencies and Critical Incidents – an Overview

Serious incidents during off-site visits are rare but they do happen. Minor incidents, whether accidents or other emergencies, are more common. Effective planning means that the likelihood of any of these is reduced, and that, when they do happen, their impact and consequences are minimised.

For more detailed information and guidance, please refer to the following documents:

- [4.1a "Avoiding Accidents and Emergencies";](#)
- [4.1c "Emergencies – Leaders";](#)
- [4.1d "Emergencies and Critical Incidents – the Establishment's Role";](#)
- [4.1e "Emergencies and Critical Incidents – the Employer's Role".](#)

A Hierarchy of Emergencies

Emergencies can be considered in four categories, depending upon the nature of the incident. Planning and preparation for off-site visits should ensure an appropriate response to an emergency in any of these categories, at any time of day or night.

1. **Incident:** a situation that is dealt with by the visit leadership team. This may, perhaps, involve some communication back to the establishment (e.g. a school) or to parents, and some support from the establishment, but the Visit Leader remains in control and is able to cope.
2. **Emergency:** an incident which overwhelms the coping mechanisms of the visit leadership team and which requires the establishment's Emergency Plan for off-site visits to be initiated. This may, perhaps, involve some communication with the employer and support from it, but the establishment takes control of the situation and is able to cope.
3. **Critical Incident:** an incident which overwhelms the coping mechanisms of both the visit leadership team and the establishment, and which requires the employer's Critical Incident Plan to be initiated in addition to the establishment's Emergency Plan. The employer takes control of the situation and supports the establishment and the visit staff and participants. Where the establishment is also the employer, or where the employer has limited capacity to provide support, the establishment's Emergency Plan should include alternative support arrangements to increase its resilience, e.g. through clusters of schools, which should be agreed in advance.
4. **Major Incident:** an incident which (if in the UK) is declared as a major incident by the police, who will take control, and where the relevant Local

Authority's Major Incident Plan is initiated, or where (if outside the UK) the relevant authorities take control. Both the establishment's Emergency Plan and the employer's Critical Incident Plan will be required in order to coordinate with the police or other authorities.

Key Points

- Deciding what to do in the event of an accident or emergency should form part of the planning and preparation of every off-site Visit, and be written down as Emergency Procedures for the visit - all members of the visit leadership team should be familiar with these;
- Emergency Procedures for individual visits should be written in the light of the establishment's Emergency Plan, which in turn should be written in the light of the employer's Critical Incident Plan;
- Where there are only one or two leaders on a visit, participants should also be familiar with the Emergency Procedures, or at least should be able to contact the establishment to get help;
- Plans must take into account the possibility of an incident occurring out of normal working hours, including overnight, at weekends or during holiday periods – a nominated competent Emergency Contact must always be contactable and available to implement the plan;
- The initial information about an incident may come to a non-specialist, such as a school receptionist or someone else who happens to answer the phone – it is essential that they know what to do (i.e. to alert the Emergency Contact);
- All those involved in off-site visits, whether part of the visit leadership team, acting as an Emergency Contact, or having a role in the Emergency/Critical Incident Plan at either establishment or employer level should:
 - Be competent to fulfil their role - this includes having the ability to function effectively in a crisis;
 - Be familiar with the relevant plan and have easy access to key information and resources;
 - Receive appropriate briefing, training and support (e.g. crib cards);
 - Have regular opportunities to engage in practice scenarios;
 - Be available.

Training and Testing

Emergency/Critical Incident Plans can never provide a step-by-step guide to responding to an emergency: they must be implemented and adapted by competent people. Thought should be given to the provision of appropriate training for relevant staff. Whatever initial training is provided it is essential that periodic scenario-based training and testing of the system (at all levels from visit leadership team to employer) is undertaken in order to keep people fresh, build adaptability and problem solving skills and highlight any flaws and weaknesses.

OEAP provides Management of Visit Emergencies (MOVE) training for establishment staff – see www.outdooreducationadvisers.co.uk/training.

