



CNA HealthPro

Creating an Emergency Response Plan

Creating an emergency response plan requires some time and effort. However, resources are available to assist you in your task. To get you started in the creation of an emergency response plan, we have outlined the essential steps below.

Additionally, both the Florida Dental Association (FDA) and the American Dental Association (ADA) have emergency planning manuals available online, and both are excellent resources for dental practices. The FDA document focuses primarily on hurricanes, although the concepts may be adapted to blizzards and wildfires. You can find the manuals at the following internet addresses:

Florida Dental Association
Five Step Guide for Disaster Preparedness and Recovery
<http://www.floridadental.org/foundation/disaster.html>

American Dental Association
Emergency Planning & Disaster Recovery in the Dental Office
http://www.ada.org/prof/prac/planning_recovery_manual.pdf

Identifying leadership

The first step in developing an emergency response plan (ERP) is to designate responsibility for overseeing a comprehensive planning process. This individual should be knowledgeable about the practice operations, experienced in resolving problems and making decisions, and capable of working effectively with employees. In many cases, this responsibility will be assumed by the dentist. If it is delegated, the practice owner must make a commitment to implement the program, budget necessary funds, and establish a timetable. The dentist should review progress, approve suggested elements and see that they are implemented until each part of the plan is completed.

Assessing risks

The next step is to conduct a vulnerability assessment. The overall purpose of a vulnerability assessment is to develop a realistic list of potential hazards that might affect your practice, highlighting the most likely and de-emphasizing the improbable. Begin by identifying and evaluating any hazards that may exist, both internal and external to your practice. Damage to your office space due to a fire or roof collapse would directly affect your practice. However, a fire in a neighboring suite or building also may have repercussions for you. Even after the emergency evacuation, an interruption of utilities service or smoke and water damage from a fire could require you to close your office for a period of time. In areas subject to natural disasters such as hurricanes, earthquakes and floods, it is necessary to analyze each potential natural disaster risk.

Detailing strengths and weaknesses

Certain strengths and weaknesses will either help or hinder your ability to respond to emergencies. It is important to identify these elements so that the practice may concentrate on those areas for improvement.

The emergency response leader must assess the strengths and weaknesses of the practice in the following areas:

- Type of fire protection provided and its working condition
- Existing storage hazards (e.g., volatile liquids in the lab area)
- Natural hazard exposures (usually weather related)
- Staffing or equipment limitations
- Emergency training and preparedness of personnel

Levels of response

Next, check with various local authorities and business contacts to learn of their response plans, and determine how they affect your own planning. For example, inquire how long it will take for the local fire department to get to your office in the event of a fire. If it is longer than you had expected, you may wish to consider storing your patient charts in longer-rated fireproof cabinets. If there is a power outage, how long is the average service interruption for your electric utility? In the event of a water main break or boil order, even if your office is able to open, a lack of power or potable water may preclude business as usual. The capabilities and resources available in your community should be ascertained in advance.

Be certain to discuss with your Professional Protector Plan *for Dentists* State Administrator Agent the various risks you face and how to best protect you in the event of a loss.

Contact your local dental association and other practices in the area to determine whether any mutual aid plans or agreements exist in which you can participate. Participation in mutual aid programs can be very beneficial. Your dental association can provide valuable information and resources about emergency planning. Research time can be shortened since information about community resources may have already been developed.

Developing the plan

At this point, the potential crises that could affect your practice and the resources available should be known. The next steps are:

- Determining the hazards to address
- Developing procedures for prevention, response and recovery from these events
- Documenting them, in writing, in the form of an ERP

It is impractical to address every potential emergency. At a minimum, all events with a high probability of occurrence should be addressed, as well as any emergencies governed by state, federal and local laws and regulations.

Identifying plan objectives

Your practice should include clearly stated objectives and instructions in your ERP. The plan should include:

- Potential emergencies
- Steps to be taken prior to, during and after an emergency
- Names of the personnel responsible for performing these actions

Your emergency plan should include specific instructions on how to perform essential tasks. For example, it is not sufficient to simply list “evacuation of patients” in your plan. The procedures for patient evacuation should be developed with designated staff responsibility assigned for each component task.

Create a written policy that includes, as a minimum, the following three important sections:

Purpose – the intent and objectives of the plan should be clear.

Policy – the practice commitment to the plan should be expressly outlined. The policy should be reviewed at least once a year to ensure that changing conditions are included and updated.

Responsibility – personnel responsible for creating the plan and carrying out its instructions should be identified by name or job title. The assignment of specific tasks should be reviewed on an annual basis and updated whenever personnel changes are made.

The written policy also should include the following:

- Training requirements for personnel so they can perform the assigned response duties.
- Procedures for monitoring the ERP over time by auditing the plan at least annually, and revising as needed. Changes will occur and as they do, they must be well managed. Audits of equipment, storage and property help determine past and evolving changes and future plans.
- Process to ensure that the ERP is updated promptly, as needed, for changes in location, extent of internal and external protection available, and risk exposures.
- Development of the ERP and training methods for personnel to respond efficiently during and after an emergency. For example, in the case of a predicted storm warning or watch, someone may be needed to carry out emergency tasks, such as moving certain patient records and backing up electronic files.

Testing the plan

The emergency plan should then be tested to ensure that the procedures and instructions are complete and workable, and that business applications, files, records and equipment can be restored.

Education and training

Once the emergency plan has been created, train your personnel to carry out emergency actions. Conduct drills regularly. Don't overlook instruction in the use of safety, emergency and fire-extinguishing equipment. To keep training current, hold at least two drills each year in which you walk through a simulated emergency scenario. Then, discuss your experiences with your staff, amending the plan as necessary.

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