



for Schools on Homeland Security



Prepared by Emergency Management Division - Michigan Department of State Police

There has been considerable discussion in local communities about what schools should do if the Office of Homeland Security elevates the National Advisory System Threat Level to the Severe (Red) Condition. These FAQ's address confusion of terminology and the potential problem schools may face in emergency planning.

1. If the federal government announces that the nation is elevated to a "Severe" Threat Level (Red), does that mean all Michigan Schools (public, private and parochial) will automatically close?

No. *Even if the nation is at the highest National Threat Level it does not necessarily mean that there is a specific threat to Michigan communities.* The State of Michigan will mandate school closure if there is a specific, credible threat to all, or to a specific area, of Michigan.

2. Some school plans call for them to be *automatically closed* at the "Severe" Threat Level (Red) ... "is this a good idea?"

No. If the Office of Homeland Security raises the level to "Severe" (Red) *it is a national condition and Michigan may not be threatened.* Potentially, the nation could be at the "Severe Threat Level" for a long time. Local schools that decide to close without specific information from the State of Michigan or local law enforcement *will still be subject to the state-mandated day or hourly requirement.* (This is the same as local schools closing for severe weather events or power outages.)

3. If the National Advisory System elevates to the "Severe" level, where can schools find information on what to do?

The State of Michigan will mandate closures if there is a specific, credible threat to all or to a specific area of Michigan. In the event this happens, government authorities will contact schools (public, private, and parochial). At that time, the Governor's Office along with the State Police, Dept. of Education, and others will communicate **specific** information to Michigan citizens and schools. They may outline specific protective actions (such as evacuation, school closure, lockdowns, implementing "Code Red", etc.) to further protect Michigan's schools.

In addition, local law enforcement, and emergency management may augment these measures with specific instructions or guidance to their area schools.

If the nation goes to "Severe" and *there is no specific threat to Michigan, schools are still encouraged to employ security and communication protocols without closing schools.* These may include but are not limited to:

- Superintendent's notification of all staff (public, private, and parochial administrators) within the district of the elevated condition.
- Implementation of heightened security procedures.
- Ensure transportation personnel are ready for evacuation, if needed.
- Possible suspension of non-classroom activities.
- Conduct ongoing discussions with local law enforcement, responding agencies, and emergency management.



4. Does the National Security Advisory System Threat Level of “Severe” (Red) mean the same thing as a school’s term of “Code Red”?

No. They are not the same things. The term, “Code Red” is used by schools to trigger certain protective measures for *any* crisis situation. The National Threat Level “Severe” (or the Red level) is a rank that denotes the US is at the highest condition for a potential *terrorist attack* due to credible information. At the “Severe Threat Level”, the Office of Homeland Security may mandate federal departments and agencies take *general* actions including:

- Increasing or redirecting personnel to address critical emergency needs.
- Closing some public/governmental facilities.

“Code Red” was in existence prior to the National Advisory System. **“Code Red” protocols were designed as a safety precaution in schools, to be used for “all hazards”, not just terrorism.** Code Red specific actions may include:

- Stopping class activities temporarily, and waiting for further instructions from the administration.
- Keeping all students in classrooms and taking attendance.
- Locking exterior doors.
- Direct communication via classroom phones.
- Turning off all computer access to the Internet.

5. Do schools need to prepare a separate Homeland Security Plan?

No. Schools should already have an emergency management plan that addresses an “all hazard approach”; terrorism is just one of those hazards. However, **schools should develop specific procedures** or protocols that outline duties (actions taken by staff and students) that mirror the National Security Advisory System Threat Levels. For specific protocols, see the 1999 PA 102 Statewide School Safety Information Policy or the Red Cross’ web-site at www.redcross.org/alert.

6. Once a school writes procedures for each of the National Threat Levels, are they done?

No. The process has just begun.

- **Schools must meet with local emergency responders and emergency management to make sure that their plans integrate with local government plans.** (Local emergency responders include local emergency management, law enforcement, fire, EMS, public works, and public health.) It would also be advisable to plan with local utilities (gas, water, electric, and phone) about specific resource needs of the school.
- **The best way to know if plans or procedures work is to test them.** Schools should work with local emergency management to conduct exercise activities. Schools are required to do tornado and fire drills. They should also practice lockdown or evacuation and re-entry to the school campus.
- **After the drills, schools should evaluate their plans and make needed changes.**

7. Is a School Emergency Management Plan and a School Crisis Plan the same thing?

No. A crisis plan is one portion of an emergency management plan. School crisis planning specifically deals with the psychological aspects of school emergencies. An emergency management plan, on the other hand, is the master plan that outlines how schools can deal with *any* emergency. Many schools call it their “safety plan”. This plan utilizes an “all-hazards approach” which can adapt to any hazard schools may face (terrorism, school violence, power outage, severe weather, etc.)

Building relationships is fundamental to emergency planning. To ensure an effective approach, schools must discuss their plans and procedures with local response agencies (police, dispatch, fire, EMS, and public works) to make sure they are realistic. In addition, schools need to include outreach efforts to other organizations that may assist schools in times of disaster (e.g., utility companies, volunteer groups, vendors and suppliers.)

Note: Remember to train ALL staff to your plan, including volunteers (classroom, cafeteria, and recess staff) student and substitute teachers.



8. Schools are receiving numerous calls from parents asking what planning is being done for terrorism...What should schools say?

Communicate with parents. They need information to be sure their children are and will be safe. Put disaster preparedness and school safety information in letters to the parents, newsletters, and discuss it at school meetings and outings. *Schools do not need to give parents the specifics of the plans, just an overview of preparedness efforts.*

In an escalated level, encourage parents not to pick up their children before the end of the school day. Explain that efforts have been made to keep students safe while at school. If a large number of fearful parents converge on the school, it will take essential staff away from important disaster preparedness duties. In a terrorism situation, like other threatening situations, (e.g., tornadoes warnings and hazardous material accidents), students may be safer at school than in a car, on a bus, or home alone.

Finally, encourage families to have a disaster plan. Michigan faces severe weather, hazardous material events and power outages frequently. Disaster preparedness information is available on the EMD website, at www.mspemd.org or the Homeland Security website, at www.ready.gov. *One of the most important aspects of family and school disaster planning is communication.* In any disaster event, parents and students may be in separate places. Encourage families to have someone that they can call outside the affected area to give information on their whereabouts. In times of disaster, local phone service may not work.

9. Schools are in the business of education, NOT emergency planning...where can they find help for Homeland Security procedures and general emergency management planning?

Having a safe school environment is elemental to education. Every county (and some municipalities) have an Emergency Management Program, which is tasked with duties in disaster and disaster preparedness (this includes Homeland Security). The local emergency manager can give schools assistance on planning, training, and exercising. Local law enforcement and fire departments can and should assist in school planning efforts. (A complete listing of Emergency Management Programs is available on the Emergency Management website.)

The Michigan State Police, Emergency Management Division (EMD) offers the following guidance for schools on their web-site:

- Site Emergency Planning Workbook (Publication 602)
- Michigan Hazard Analysis (Publication 103) (This is also an excellent reference book for school history and science classes.)
- School procedures and documents.

In addition, EMD annually offers specific training for schools. (See the website under "Training".) If you have any questions, please contact Michigan State Police, Emergency Management Division, Training Section at (517) 333-5036.

10. Our school would like to augment our current lesson plans incorporating Homeland Security issues and efforts. Is there any curriculum or general information available for schools?

Yes. Depending on the age and maturity level of the children, there are many options things available:

- **Have students put together disaster preparedness kits.** They can be used for all hazards such as power outages, severe weather events and even terrorism.
- **Engage in patriotic activities.**
- **Identify all students that have had family members called to active duty.** Their home life may be drastically changed and they may need additional support from the school.
- **Establish a support group in the school for these students and their extended families to discuss their concerns with each other.**
- **Work with established groups before donating goods to the troops** (such Red Cross and Boy Scouts).



➤ **Elementary, Middle School and High School**

Disaster Preparedness curriculums for elementary aged children can be found at:

- “FEMA for Kids”-for an “all hazards approach” to emergencies at <http://www.fema.gov/kids/>
- FEMA national security emergencies at <http://www.fema.gov/kids/nse/>

Red Cross has the program “Masters of Disaster” which can augment science, math, language arts and social studies curriculums at <http://www.redcross.org/disaster/masters/>

