



Guide for Developing High-Quality Emergency Operations Plans for Houses of Worship

U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Federal Emergency Management Agency

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Many people think of a house of worship as a safe area where violence and emergencies cannot affect them. However, violence in houses of worship is not a new phenomenon. In addition to violent acts, fires, tornados, floods, hurricanes, earthquakes, and arson also affect houses of worship. With many incidents occurring with little to no warning, many houses of worship are developing and updating plans and procedures to ensure the safety and security of their congregations, staff, and facilities. In collaboration with other houses of worship and community partners (i.e., governmental entities that have a responsibility in the plan, including first responders, public health officials, and mental health officials), houses of worship can take steps to plan for these potential emergencies through the creation of an emergency operations plan (EOP). Additionally, community organizations and private sector entities may have a role in the plan. Houses of worship are distinctive settings in that congregants share a common bond and have a predisposition to volunteer. The demographics of a congregation often mean that children and the elderly are present and may need assistance. This guide provides houses of worship with information regarding emergency operations planning for the spectrum of threats and hazards they may face. It discusses actions that may be taken before, during, and after an incident in order to reduce the impact on property and any loss of life and it encourages every house of worship to develop an EOP. The Departments issuing this guidance are providing examples of good practices and matters to consider for planning and implementation purposes. The guidance does not create any requirements beyond those included in applicable law and regulations, or create any additional rights for any person, entity, or organization. Moreover, the Departments fully understand that congregations may approach some of these issues differently than government and other community organizations. At the same time, the Departments would like to assist congregations that are interested in emergency operations planning, and this guidance is offered in that spirit. The information presented in this document generally constitutes informal guidance and provides examples that may be helpful. This guide is designed to be scalable for use by small to large-sized houses of worship in order to help navigate the planning process. Used in its entirety, this guide provides information on the fundamentals of planning and their application. At a minimum, houses of worship are encouraged to complete the planning process and develop a basic plan.

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