Washington State PTA
everychild. onevoice.

Emergency Preparedness:
It's about knowing your school's risks and having a plan

How well-prepared is your school in case of emergency? To find out, create your school's risk profile.

SCHOOL RISK PROFILE:
Check each risk your school could face.

- ❑ **Fire**
- ❑ **Earthquake**
- ❑ **School intruders**
- ❑ **Others?**

School location near:

- ❑ **transportation routes of vehicles that carry hazardous materials, *e.g. truck routes or railroad rights of way***
- ❑ **underground utility vaults, high-voltage power lines or above ground transformers**
- ❑ **facilities containing toxic or reactive chemicals**
- ❑ **biological laboratories**
- ❑ **radiological/nuclear facilities**
- ❑ **underground gas or oil pipelines**
- ❑ **multi-story buildings vulnerable to damage or collapse**
- ❑ **water towers and tanks**
- ❑ **others**

For every risk you identified, we recommend a corresponding emergency preparedness plan.

If your school has written emergency plans for all the check marks on your school's risk profile—**AND--**regularly practices them: Congratulations!

If not, you have plenty of company.

A recent pilot study* reported parental and school employee beliefs about emergency preparedness in Washington State schools for the 2004-2005 school year. The 77 respondents were asked if they thought their schools had written emergency plans for fire, earthquake and school intruders as well as for chemical, biological and radiological hazards. They completed a total of 103 surveys, one for each school their children attended or in which the respondent worked. Ultimately, the surveys described 85 different schools (70 public and 15 private) from 26 school districts in 7 Washington counties.

Eighty-nine percent of survey respondents thought their schools had a written emergency plan for fires, 85% for earthquakes and 75% for intruder lockdowns. In contrast, only about 10% thought their schools had shelter-in-place and evacuation plans specifically designed for chemical, biological and radiological risks.

This small study was not designed to find out if schools really had emergency plans, it only asked if respondents thought they did. However, it is significant that so many more respondents were "not sure" if emergency plans existed for chemical, biological and radiological risks when compared with fire, earthquake and school intruder risks. This suggests that either schools lack such plans or parents haven't been informed about them.

Parents play an essential role in school emergency planning. They help reinforce the seriousness of the risks, teach prevention strategies and ease children's anxieties. Ultimately, parents need to know what they should do in an emergency to help, not hinder, their school.

The authors of the study also noted how some parents reacted to the thought of chemical, biological or radiological accidents. A frequent reply was "I just don't want to even think about it". If this is a parent's response, our children are likely fearful as well.

The solution is to educate parents, children and schools about how to identify hazards and then devise ways to reduce the associated risk. It is of paramount importance to promote a change in 'school culture' so that emergency plans and drills for chemical, biological and radiological hazards become as common place as fire drills.

For its part, the Washington State PTA now promotes emergency awareness and preparedness planning for chemical, biological and radiological/nuclear hazards as a newly adopted Advocacy Topic. Take a moment and create a risk profile for your school or home and then determine if you have a corresponding emergency plan.

** An unpublished local survey conducted in the Seattle area -- the complete report was sent to the Washington State Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction.