

# 25 Do's and Don'ts *of* Emergency Preparedness

*While some of these tips appear light-hearted, we strongly support every item listed below. Note that this conglomeration is not complete... but we think it is a good place to start.*

1. **Don't... do nothing.** It's even easier than you think.
  - a. **Do** create a plan, practice that plan, and be ready to act. If you do nothing now, you have simply ensured the outcome then.
2. **Don't... develop a terrible Emergency Preparedness strategy.** Like giving your staff member's [buckets of rocks to throw at armed intruders](#).
  - a. **Do** consult with a professional on a proficient, full-circle safety strategy. Strategies should empower individuals, without relying on rash decisions that will ultimately hurt more than then help. At the very least, clear policy for preventing and responding to violence (and then training on that policy) should be provided to staff.
3. **Don't... turn your workplace into a prison in an effort to keep everyone perfectly safe.** You can't make it perfectly safe. Even worse, the bars, razor wire, and 8-foot fences will create a psychological self-fulfilling prophecy: when you treat people like prisoners, they act like prisoners.
  - a. **Do** get a professional risk assessment. Some environmental changes may help reduce risk, but they are not always what you might expect. Research shows that beautifying your campus and creating welcoming and friendly environments can go hand-in-hand with CPTED (Crime prevention through environmental design).
4. **Don't... start carrying a gun at work because you feel passionately about this topic.** Or you might end up like [this parkland teacher](#) who left his gun in a public restroom (Whoops!) and found out when a drunk homeless man shot a hole in the wall. Or [this staff member](#) in CA who decided he wanted to teach students how to disarm an armed intruder but accidentally shot them instead.
  - a. **Do** get professional training on how to identify and use effective environmental weapons. Like the chemical armament... I mean fire-extinguisher... sitting in your office. From personal experience, we can say this tool is completely incapacitating when discharged into someone's face.
5. **Don't... break the law** and wrack up tens of thousands of dollars in fire code violation fines in an effort to keep your facility safe. If you're thinking about installing a lockdown device

or making modifications to your doors that could help prevent an intruder from entering, you're probably breaking fire code.

- a. **Do** send letters, call, and stop by your police and fire department to inform them how ridiculous the miscommunication between their departments can be. We're hopeful that the upcoming NFPA 3000 standard (revision to the national fire code) will finally pass, allowing some basic safety measures to be put in place. Nevertheless, it has been pending for several years. In the meantime, get a professional risk assessment and professional training on how to effectively use common items to make an area secure.
6. **Don't... think having someone with a gun around is going to fix all of your problems.** An untrained person with a firearm is [more of a risk than a help](#). Keep in mind, "Armed Security" personnel are only required to receive a whopping 8-hours of training in firearm use under WA State Law. This is a gamble at best. I don't know about you, but we aren't exactly excited when we see armed security *anywhere*.
- a. **Do** invest in a trained professional who carries a firearm, a mentality of action, and a heart of humility. How much time, training, and refresher training will it take to develop enough proficiency to engage an active threat while not accidentally killing innocent people standing behind that threat? How do you know the armed person is willing to act (correctly) when the time comes? How do you know the person has enough character and humility to carry a lethal tool? Such a person is possible, but they are very hard to find.
7. **Don't... move to South East Montana because you think isolating yourself is the answer to a dangerous culture.** Acts of violence can happen anywhere you're around other people. Plus, you haven't really considered bear attacks, snake bites, and hypothermia.
- a. **Do** take real steps to create a plan for emergency preparedness: a personal plan that laterally applies when your shopping, at the movies, or at work is key. Anytime you are around other people, you should be confident in your action plan.
8. **Don't... consider leaving your current employer because they aren't taking emergency preparedness seriously enough.** While safety and security is often the number one priority for schools and businesses, less than one percent of the budget is statistically spent on workplace safety nation-wide.
- a. **Do** lobby for the safety of your staff and security of your building in a respectful way. A great way to start is to request your organization to develop official policy and procedures surrounding how you respond to violence, early warning signs of violence, and emergencies at work. If they don't have those, request your HR team consult with a professional to develop some clear guidance!
9. **Don't... rely on cell-phone communication during a major emergency.** Cell phone towers are like any other electronic service: they draw to a certain capacity and then get overloaded. Even if we're not talking about an earthquake, cell phones generally become ineffective means of communicating within the first fifteen minutes of a major event.

- a. **Do** research and invest in alternative means of communication. Having a predetermined plan on using smoke-signals is better than not having a predetermined plan at all. Alternatively, get some radios.
10. **Don't... consider an online training program or train-the-trainer course sufficient when preparing your staff for escalating violence.** If you take a three-day online course on how to build an airplane, will you have all the necessary skills to build and then confidently put your family on that same plan? No. While online training programs courses might work well for history lessons or English literature, an E-learning program is not going to increase your situational awareness or empower you any more than watching an action flick. Train-the-trainer courses are not an option when dealing with high-risk encounters, like violence.
  - a. **Do** invest in empowering, hands-on training and preparedness. Being able to act under stressful circumstances requires hands-on training from professional facilitators that empowers you to prevent, mitigate, act and recover correctly.
11. **Don't... wait to practice for a large-scale event until one actually happens.** If you're satisfied with the measures you already have in place, you should re-evaluate.
  - a. **Do** have a professional facilitator walk your team through table-top exercises and drills until you're ready for a full-scale functional exercise. Repeat this process every so often (which doesn't mean every ten years).
12. **Don't... assume local police are emergency preparedness experts.** Most law enforcement officers are professionals at responding to violence and criminal law. As far as empowering training, CPTED, hosting drills/exercises, developing threat assessment teams, or conducting risk assessments... there is no guarantee LEO's are going to know what they're talking about. Note the Boston Marathon bombing, when Law Enforcement officials [informed the public](#) cell-phone towers were shut down to prevent further explosions (when they were really just over-capacity and not working).
  - a. **Do** work with an agency whose main focus is emergency management. It's a different specialty for a reason.
13. **Don't... think the hundred-year-old radios in the closet are going to work during a major emergency.** They won't.
  - a. **Do** test your emergency equipment regularly to determine what needs to be replaced, upgraded, or evaluated. Technology evolves quickly and we should be using all the tools we have available.
14. **Don't... think an emergency is over as quickly as a 2-minute news blurb.** In a real violent intruder event, you may be barricaded or held in an area for six to twelve hours. In an earthquake, you may be stuck in the same place for days and without supplies for weeks.
  - a. **Do** have an emergency kit handy that will help with your immediate needs (medical, food, water, sanitary).

15. **Don't... underestimate “sanitary” problems in emergency events.** We're not talking about availability of “hand-wipes” or bottles of disinfectant. We're talking about the ability to go to the bathroom. This is often overlooked... and when you have twenty-five kids locked down in a classroom for six hours, things can get really ugly.
  - a. **Do** have a plan to take care of this smelly problem. A 5-gallon bucket with a lid where emergency supplies are stored could be a legitimate solution.
  
16. **Don't... allocate resources in areas where you'll never need them.** It's a waste of time and money.
  - a. **Do** have a professional conduct a risk assessment, to identify your most likely and catastrophic risks. Prepare and plan for those, not for an asteroid that creates a thousand-foot high wave which then somehow makes it over the mountains to destroy your place of work.
  
17. **Don't... assume Emergency Preparedness is a conversation just for senior management.** Your voice matters.
  - a. **Do** involve key stakeholders in every aspect of the Emergency Preparedness process. Stakeholders can and should include employees, students, community members, local agencies, and senior management.
  
18. **Don't... overlook areas of risk.** Everything from a convex mirror in the parking lot to tightening up your janitor's chemical hygiene program can seriously make your place of work safer.
  - a. **Do** invite a professional to conduct a safety audit of your facility.
  
19. **Don't... think that as soon as the police arrive, the emergency situation is over.** First responders typically arrive after emergency events have been resolved. Once they show up, they still have to come find you: this takes a long time.
  - a. **Do** understand that in a dynamic emergency, YOU are the real first responder. Know what actions can save your life. Then take action.
  
20. **Don't... ever say, “I knew that person would be the next mass shooter...”** and realize later that you never did anything about it.
  - a. **Do** implement an on-site threat assessment team to evaluate, investigate, and then act on all threatening actions, behaviors, and areas of concern. Know what resources and team members you have available to provide help and support to people in need.

21. **Don't... create a mass-casualty event by strictly enforcing your “no-tolerance” policies.** As important as firm rules are, creating a triggering event (like a termination) can push a desperate person to justify a desperate decision.
  - a. **Do spend time and energy hiring quality employees.** This is invaluable. But also understand that as the river of life winds onward, circumstances change. Have resources available to support your employees instead of making them feel like an outcast.
  
22. **Don't... blame mental health for all acts of violence.** Mental health estimations and strategies are important, but they are not all inclusive. All human beings fantasize about things they know they shouldn't do. And they do them anyway. The result? Hurt and brokenness that effects more than we can imagine.
  - a. **Do recognize that an “us vs them” mentality is not going to reduce evil in the world.** People who were once very normal can do horrible things in the right circumstances. Fixing these problems means addressing the broken hearts of our neighbors. This starts by caring, listening, and empathizing: not labeling.
  
23. **Don't... underestimate the power of your environmental climate.** History consistently shows us attackers very carefully selecting targets that will “deserve it”.
  - a. **Do create a climate that is welcoming, caring, and orderly.** The friendly, welcoming nature of your workplace effects more than just customers and staff. It helps change the entire culture of your community, minimizing risk and increasing livability for everyone.
  
24. **Don't... be petrified by anxiety: before, during or after a violent event.** You have the ability and a choice to plan, prepare, and train. But there are no guarantees in Emergency Preparedness (just like in life).
  - a. **Do believe that full life and peace can be your companion during any trail.** Joy can be found in every day. Finding it will take effort, and finding it after the dark of a violent event will take a deep belief. You are made for more: you need not be defined by the circumstances of your past.
  
25. **Don't... assume this list doesn't apply to you because of your unique circumstances.**
  - a. **Because it does.**