

Educating Classes About Self-Protection: An Evacuation Plan

Based on a paper by
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In order to protect life, property and environment, and to eliminate or reduce risks, prevention is a necessary, basic premise. Schools house large number of people, but even on the threshold of the 21st century, we have still not acquired a full awareness of the necessity of safety at places of work and study. To achieve this, we need urgently to implement in all educational establishments an evacuation and safety plan enabling a co-ordinated and organised action to be taken in emergencies, and ensuring that it can be handled calmly, efficiently and at no risk.

The evacuation and safety plan would consist of five phases:

1) The school management will hold briefings to create awareness of individual and collective self-protection among students, parents and staff. Co-ordinated measures should be taken by the education authorities to introduce an evacuation plan in schools.

2) Inspection of school buildings and facilities should be undertaken, focusing on the plan of the building, its location, degree of potential risk of the various parts of the building, available means of protection, existing gaps in protection, assessment of escape routes and a cut-off point for gas supply, electricity, boilers, etc.

3) Choosing an alarm system (for example sound or lights), fire detection devices (where feasible), marking and planning escape routes,

which should be posted in a place visible to all users of the building.

4) The School Security Group would be responsible for leading all school building occupants to a safe outside place known as the "security zone." The number of people using the building, its features, and the diversity of the tasks to be performed will determine how many members this Group should have. The functions of the School Security Group should be as follows:

- to promote communication among parents, teachers, students and other building users to determine the implementation of an evacuation plan, at the same time creating individual and collective self-protection awareness. The members of the Group should regularly inspect escape routes, establish outside security zones, publicize the evacuation plan, carry out emergency drills and familiarize the occupants with the use of fire extinguishers and types of fires;

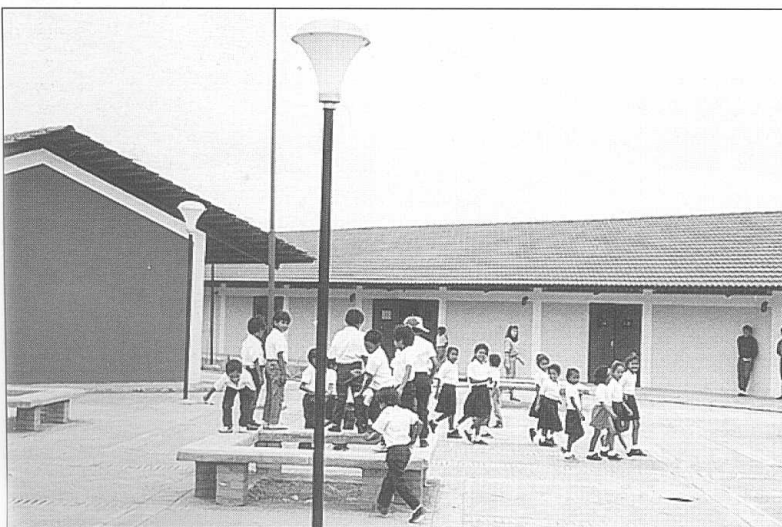
- to formulate prevention and safety standards in relation to fire prevention, giving alarm, appropriate behaviour during the emergency, proper guidance towards pre-established escape routes and assigning tasks to members of the School Safety Group. Such tasks include calling for outside assistance (it is therefore recommended that emergency telephone numbers be prominently displayed), giving alarm, cutting off gas and electricity, opening emergency exits, searching toilets, directing the evacuation, assembling the students in the outside security zone, and providing first aid (it is recommended that at least one person be trained in first aid).

5) In case of actual emergency:

- the headmaster should give the alarm;
- the School Security Group then moves into action with each member performing the task previously assigned to him. (It is advisable to appoint two or more persons for each task, so there are alternative individuals available in case of absences);

- the teacher, or, in his absence a responsible pupil, will direct the evacuation. The students should then line up in single file, following which the student closest to the door

*Training for disaster
preparedness in a
school in Venezuela.
Photo: courtesy of
UNESCO*



opens it and the roll call is taken;

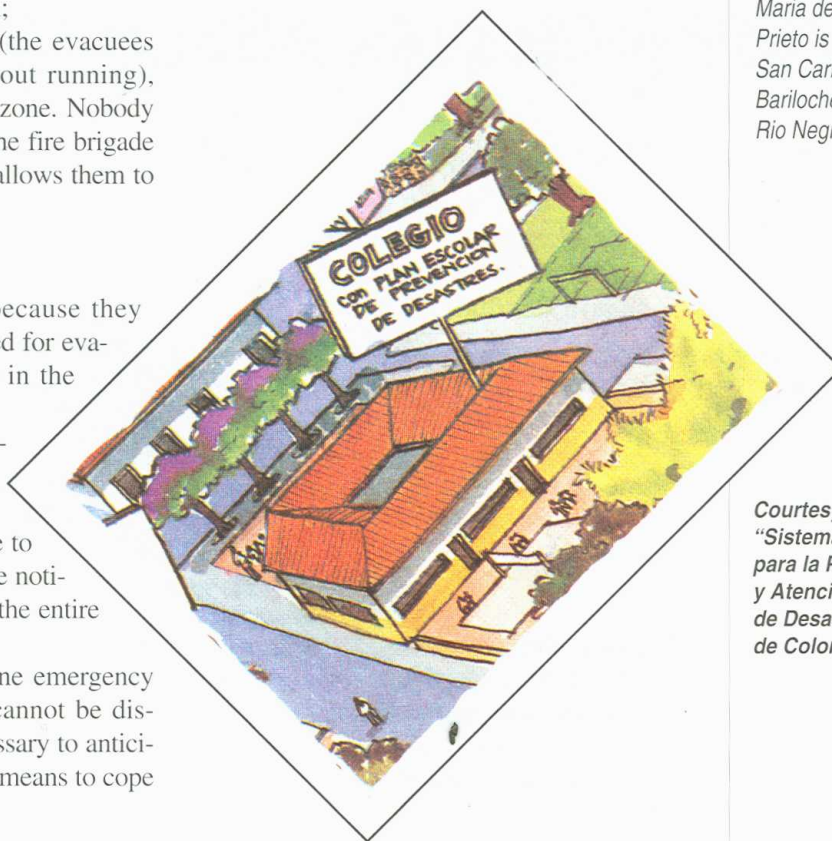
-once outside the building (the evacuees should move swiftly but without running), they should go to the security zone. Nobody should enter the building until the fire brigade or another competent authority allows them to do so.

Fire drills

Fire drills are important because they allow to estimate the time needed for evacuation, detect possible errors in the fire alarm system, etc.

For fire drills to be conducted, in some cases permission must be obtained from appropriate authorities. It is preferable to hold these sessions after advance notice had been given in writing to the entire teaching staff.

The possibility that a genuine emergency may occur during a fire drill cannot be dismissed, and it is therefore necessary to anticipate it and provide the necessary means to cope with it successfully.



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Courtesy of "Sistema Nacional para la Prevención y Atención de Desastres de Colombia"

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International Conference on Disaster Mitigation in Health Facilities

Mexico City, 26-28 February 1996

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Further information can be obtained from: Pan American Organization, Emergency Preparedness Program. 525 Twenty-third Street, N.W.; Washington, D.C. 20037, U.S.A.. Tel.: (202) 861-4324; fax: (202) 775-4578. Internet: disaster@paho.or

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