

SPECIAL CIRCULAR NO. 17 1990-1991

October 17, 1990

NEW YORK CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
OFFICE OF THE CHANCELLOR

TO: COMMUNITY SCHOOL BOARD PRESIDENTS
ALL SUPERINTENDENTS
SUPERINTENDENT OF CITYWIDE SPECIAL EDUCATION
EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS, HEADS OF ALL OFFICES
PRINCIPALS OF ALL DAY SCHOOLS, TEACHERS, PARENTS ASSOCIATION
PRESIDENTS AND CUSTODIANS/CUSTODIAN ENGINEERS

FROM: JOSEPH A. FERNANDEZ, CHANCELLOR 

SUBJECT: Fire Drills, Fire Safety, Shelter Drills, and A Suggested Plan for
Neighborhood Disasters (Including Dispersal of Children)

FIRE DRILLS AND SAFETY

ABSTRACT

Our mutual concern for the safety of our students underscores the need for schools and districts to develop programs for fire safety and prevention. **These regulations address fire drill procedures and requirements and include guidelines for school fire prevention safety.** Frequent unannounced drills with proper leadership and discipline help ensure safe evacuation in the event of an actual emergency. Plans for Fire Drills should be prepared and information posted in conspicuous locations throughout the schools.

I. FIRE DRILLS

A. PURPOSE

The purpose of fire drills is to instruct and train students and staff in emergency evacuation procedures so that they might leave the school building in the shortest time possible and without panic in the event of an actual emergency. On hearing the fire signal (three gongs four times), pupils under the leadership of **Teachers** and other school staff must go to the street without delay.

B. FREQUENCY AND MONITORING

1. a. **AS REQUIRED BY STATE LAW, THE PRINCIPAL SHALL HOLD FIRE DRILLS NO LESS THAN TWELVE TIMES IN EACH SCHOOL YEAR, EIGHT OF WHICH SHALL BE HELD PRIOR TO DECEMBER FIRST. Neglect by a Principal, or other person in charge, to comply with the above requirements is a misdemeanor punishable by a fine and/or imprisonment.**
 - b. In buildings with fire escapes, at least four of the drills shall include the use of such escapes.
 - c. In buildings in which summer school is conducted, at least two additional drills shall be conducted, one of which shall be held the first week of summer school.
2. A record and evaluation of each fire drill shall be maintained.
3. All fire drill reports completed by **Principals** are to be sent to the **Superintendents** for review.
4. **Superintendents** shall forward on January 30th and June 30th of each year a summary of the drills to the **Division of School Safety** for oversight.

C. GUIDELINES

1. All students and staff in the school must obey fire drill signals and regulations.
2. Equal emphasis should be placed on evacuating the school in a quick and orderly fashion. No running or horseplay shall be tolerated.
3. Fire drills shall be conducted under varying circumstances at varying hours and at unannounced times to simulate actual emergency conditions. (For example, one exit should be blocked by closing off the exit area during the fire drill.)
4. Ringing the fire gong is the usual signal for a drill. However, staff and students should be aware of alternate procedures in case of malfunctioning of the gong system. Alternate signals, such as classroom bells, public address announcements, hand bells or messengers, may be used.
5. **Instructions involving fire drills and evacuation paths to be used shall be posted in every classroom, auditorium, and cafeteria.** (Note: Fire Drill Posters--25 per package--can be obtained by ordering item #11-25-2590-00167 from the Bureau of Supplies, at 718-786-8800.)
6. Details of the school's fire drill plan should include the current number of students in holding rooms. Holding rooms are designated areas where physically handicapped students and staff wait for the Fire Department. The Fire Department will provide means of egress, when necessary. The fire drill is not complete until all students are out of the building or in holding rooms. Holding rooms must be left unlocked during occupancy.
7. Teachers shall carry their roll books to ensure the safe evacuation of all students.

II. FIRE SAFETY

- A. All students and staff must be evacuated and the alarm sounded when an emergency arises or is suspected. The decision must be made immediately; investigation of the emergency should be made after everyone has safely left the building.
- B. **Teachers and all other school staff should receive an orientation session concerning fire safety. The orientation should be held cooperatively by the Principal and the Custodian/Custodian Engineer of the school at the beginning of each year.** This meeting should be devoted to fire safety and an actual demonstration of fire fighting equipment should be included. Items to be covered at the meeting should include, but need not be limited to, the following:
 - Staff should familiarize themselves and be aware of methods of transmitting an alarm, including telephones, fire alarm boxes in the school building, and street fire alarm boxes. Pull lever stations for the interior alarms are at various locations in the school building (generally near stairs or exits); these interior alarms do not transmit a signal to the Fire Department.
 - Staff should be aware of the location and proper use of fire extinguishers and other fire fighting apparatus. The **Principal** must be certain that all school personnel know the location of the fire alarm signal boxes located in the school and know how to operate them.
 - Staff should be informed of regulations regarding flammable materials, stage settings, decorations, use of electrical equipment, chemical substances in laboratories, and other potential fire hazards.
 - **All school staff and students** should be completely familiar with fire exit drills and evacuation plans.
- C. Building inspections shall be conducted daily by the **Custodian/Custodian Engineer**, with particular attention given to the presence of fire hazards, proper equipment, access to fire doors, and visibility of signs.
- D. All exit doors must be readily openable from the inside whenever the building is occupied. The chaining or padlocking of fire doors is a punishable violation of the Administrative and Fire Safety Codes (special circular #29 1988/89).
- E. Signs prohibiting use of elevators during fire drills and emergencies shall be posted near elevators and shall provide information regarding stairway exits.
- F. Information on fire safety should be included in each school's curriculum, as required by State Law.

G. PROCEDURES IN CASE OF AN ACTUAL FIRE EMERGENCY

Whoever locates the fire should activate the fire alarm and immediately notify the school's main office of the location of the fire.

1. The **Principal** or person in charge should do the following:
 - a. Implement the fire evacuation plan **IMMEDIATELY**.
 - b. Call the Fire Department **IMMEDIATELY**.
 - c. Meet and direct the firefighters to the fire so that they do not lose valuable time locating the fire.
2. The school **Custodian/Custodian Engineer** should do the following:
 - a. In coal-fired buildings, open full all dampers to stack, cover fire with ashes, close ash pit and fire doors. Shut down air compressors, and bleed line to thermostats, maintain water level in boilers.
 - b. In oil-fired plants, shut down all oil burner equipment using switches on oil burner control board, or remote control switch. Close suction line valves closest to oil tanks. Leave dampers open. Shut down air compressors and bleed lines to thermostats, maintain water level in boilers.
 - c. Pull switches for power to school instructional equipment, blowers ventilators, etc. Switches for the lights should be left on. Boiler room switches should be left on.
 - d. Close all fire doors. If you have fire retarding doors in your school, they should be closed manually. Do not wait for fusible links to melt. Drafts would be eliminated and the fire should be confined to one section.
 - e. When the fire is extinguished, recharge all used fire extinguishers immediately.

III. SHELTER DRILLS**A. PURPOSE**

Shelter drills are necessary to train and instruct staff and students of emergency procedures in the event of a tornado, hurricane, earthquake, etc. Shelter areas are interior spaces that are away from windows and below the main floor.

B. FREQUENCY

THE PRINCIPAL IS REQUIRED TO HOLD THREE SHELTER DRILLS DURING THE SCHOOL YEAR. One of these drills is to be conducted prior to the December holiday vacation. Reports thereof are to be submitted to the **Superintendents** for review. The **Superintendents** should forward on January 30 and June 30 of each year a summary of the shelter drills to the **Division of School Safety** for review. The summary should be included as part of the fire drill report that the **Superintendents** forward semi-annually to the **Division of School Safety** (Note: Shelter Drill Posters--50 per package--can be obtained by ordering item #11-25-2320-00.x from the Bureau of Supplies, at 718-786-8800.)

C. INSTRUCTIONS FOR ADMINISTRATORS

1. All **GO-HOME** plans should be up to date.
2. There should be at least one shelter drill prior to December first. In case of floods, plans should be developed to keep students and faculty safe until they can be evacuated.
3. Each building is to be surveyed to ascertain the safest areas in which the children can be sheltered.
4. Each grade level in all junior and senior high schools will receive three (3) class periods of instruction each year based on Strand V of the Health Education curriculum or on other appropriate course areas. This instruction will center on actions which would enhance the individual's likelihood of survival in the event of disasters.

D. NEIGHBORHOOD DISASTER PLAN (Emergency Preparedness)

1. **Principals** or heads of schools are to review their neighborhood disaster plans or formulate new plans adapted to the needs of their schools in those instances where no plans exist.
2. **Principals** or heads of schools should establish an administrative procedure which delineates the separate responsibilities of staff members in the event of an emergency.
3. The school radio should be monitored (radio station WNYC has been designated as a source of emergency information and official instruction).
4. School telephones should be kept clear of all but most urgent calls.
5. Pupil dismissal for lunch or at the end of the day should be deferred pending instruction from the **Superintendent** in charge.

The following excerpt from the "School Plan for Neighborhood Disasters, Including Dispersal of Children" can serve as a guide in revising and developing a school plan.

IV. A SUGGESTED SCHOOL PLAN FOR NEIGHBORHOOD DISASTERS, INCLUDING DISPERSAL OF CHILDREN (EXCERPT)**A. GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS**

1. Fire and shelter drill instructions, signals and responses must be observed.
2. For Neighborhood Disaster Emergency Conditions, **Teachers** who are supervising classes in classrooms, gymnasiums or auditoriums, are to remain with the pupils, wherever they are, while awaiting specific instructions. In the interim, **Teachers** should do the following:
 - a. Secure immediate attention and order.
 - b. By calmness, self assurance and good humor, reassure pupils that matters are under control.
 - c. Start a game or song that will engage the children's interest and take their minds off the situation.
 - d. Do not send pupils out of the room to an office or elsewhere for any reason. Keep pupils with you and wait for further instructions.
3. **Teachers** who are out in the yards for yard duty or class outdoor period, are to bring pupils into the line-up area at once and bring the students to the closest shelter area within the school.
4. If a disaster emergency occurs while the **Teacher** and class are in transit between classroom and another part of the school building, they should go with the children to an assigned room or, if possible, to the designated shelter area.
5. During such an emergency situation, adults may rush into the school to pick up children in order to take them home. Pupils may be released to an adult known to be the parent or guardian of the child in question. A child may not be released to an adult who is not the child's parent or guardian unless the release is authorized in writing by the principal or head of school. A list must be made of the names of the students released.
6. If an emergency occurs during a time when pupils are arriving for the beginning of the session, the teachers will report to their classes in the area where the pupils are assembled.
7. All handicapped children must be accounted for and special provisions must be made for them.

B. STAFF ASSIGNMENTS

1. **Principal** - Take post in the hallway outside the Main Office door to give directions, etc.
2. **Assistant Principal** - Take post at the main entrance of the occupied floor above or below that on which the **Principal** is stationed, depending on conditions. Supervise the floor, take any immediate action that may be necessary on the floor, and stand by for orders from the **Principal**. As soon as possible, report conditions to the **Principal**, via adult messenger. Take command of the school if the **Principal** is absent or incapacitated.
3. **Secretaries** - Take post in the main office, unless ordered otherwise by the person in charge of the school, to monitor telephones and radio broadcasts. Transmit messages to and from the person in charge of school. Make first aid supplies available as ordered. Refer to the person in charge of the school all requests from adults to take students home. See to it that nobody uses the telephone for outgoing calls without authorization from the person in charge of the school.
4. **Other Teachers** - If not on assignment with pupils when emergency occurs, report to the person in charge of the school for special assignments.
5. **School Nurse** - Take post in Medical Office or room designated previously by **Principal**.
6. **School Aides and Para-Professionals** (such as Lunchroom, A-V, Educational Assistants, Teachers' Aides, Family Workers and Family Assistants) - Report to person in charge of school for assignments.
7. **School Safety Officers** - Remain in assigned posts, awaiting specific instructions from the **Principal** or person in charge; continue to secure the building.
8. The **Custodian/Custodian Engineer** and their staff must:
 - First** - Secure operational plant factors for safety, such as water lines, gas lines, electric lines, and furnace fires, if necessary.
 - Second** - Check for any possible building damage.
 - Third** - Report plant conditions to the person in charge of the school and the **Borough Plant Manager** as soon as possible.

C. CHAIN OF COMMAND SUCCESSION

1. The **Assistant Principal** will take charge of the school and make required decisions whenever the **Principal** is absent or incapacitated.
2. Three (3) **Teachers** are to be designated to take charge of the school in the event that **ALL Supervisors** are absent and/or incapacitated. These **Teachers** are to be assigned a priority number from 1 to 3 and will take charge of the school, as conditions require it. These **Teachers** are designated by name on the notice that is posted in the Main Office on the school bell system board.

D. TELEPHONE COMMUNICATION

1. The school telephone may not be used by any person for outgoing calls of any kind during an emergency, except where authorized by the **Principal**.
2. The **Principal** will ensure that emergency telephone numbers are posted on the Main Office bell signal board, listing telephone numbers to be called for various purposes during an emergency.

Principals should include their Neighborhood Disaster Plan in the school safety plans submitted to their **Superintendents**. The **Superintendents** should forward a copy to the **Division of School Safety** for oversight.

Any questions concerning this circular should be directed to Mr. J. Kirby Coughlin, Deputy Director of Plant Operation, Division of School Facilities, at 718-706-3802, or by writing Mr. Coughlin at 28-11 Queens Plaza North, Long Island City, NY 11101. You may also contact Mr. Peter J. Cummings, Chief of Administration, Division of School Safety, at 212-477-9030, or by writing Mr. Cummings at 600 East 6th Street, New York, NY 10009.