



Know Your Risks. Know What to Do.

An Emergency Operations Plan for Your House of Worship

A step-by-step guide to creating an effective EOP in accordance with FEMA recommendations.

In today's heightened threat climate, even houses of worship (HoW) are not immune to crime and acts of violence. What follows is a comprehensive Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) framework developed specifically for HoW by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

An overview of houses of worship today

There are over 250,000 HoW in the U.S. that:

- Provide a safe environment for community members
- Welcome newcomers for the purpose of spiritual connection
- May offer child care, preschool, and religious education
- Can be places of refuge during a natural disaster or crisis

The importance of an Emergency Operations Plan for HoW

According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Hate Crimes Statistics program, 21.8% of all hate crime incidents reported in 2017 were motivated by religious bias¹. And between 2005 and 2015, there were 24 HoW shootings² – an average of 2.7 per year.

Developed in collaboration with local government and community partners, an EOP provides a HoW with the structure and processes needed to ensure a coordinated response in the event of an emergency.

Creating an Emergency Operations Plan

There are four primary areas to consider when creating and implementing an EOP:

- Principles
- Basic plan
- Planning process
- Active shooter situations

What follows are further details for each of these areas to help you develop and implement your EOP.

1. <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/statistics-on-religious-hate-crimes#archive>
2. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/common-church-shootings/>

Help protect your house of worship with an Emergency Operations Plan

Principles

Creating an EOP is a collaborative process that should:

- Be supported by leadership
- Be customized to fit the unique needs of each individual building
- Address all threats and hazards
- Consider the access needs of HoW community members when determining what can and should be limited
- Take all possible settings and times into account

The Planning Process

There are 5 steps to an EOP planning process that's flexible and adaptable to a religious facility's unique needs:

Step 1: Form a collaborative planning team that includes community partners:

- Local emergency management staff
- First responders
- Nongovernmental partners (such as the American Red Cross)
- Public and mental health professionals

Step 2: Identify and assess risks and hazards

Step 3: Determine goals and objectives

Step 4: Identify courses of action

Step 5: Prepare, review, and approve the plan

Step 6: Implement and maintain the plan

The Basic Plan

The Basic Plan section of an EOP covers the approach to operations before, during, and after an emergency. It consists of:

- A **purpose** that sets the foundation for the EOP by stating its intended use
- A **situation overview** explaining the necessity of an EOP in today's heightened threat climate
- A **concept of operations** that provides a broad overview of operational intent from a user's perspective



- An **assignment of responsibilities** pertaining to HoW staff, families, guardians, community partners, and organizational functions during an emergency
- A **direction, control, and coordination framework** that ties together various aspects of the EOP
- An **information directive** addressing the collection, analysis, and dissemination of information before, during, and after an emergency
- **Training and exercises** used to support the EOP
- **Administration, finance, and logistics** support requirements and resource management
- The assignment of EOP **development and maintenance** responsibilities
- A list of **authorities and references** that provide the legal basis for the EOP

An EOP for HoW should also address these critical operational functions:

- **Evacuation** of buildings and grounds
- **Lockdown** to secure buildings and grounds
- **Shelter-in-place** considerations when congregants and staff are required to remain inside a building or room during and/or following an emergency
- **Recovery** from an emergency situation
- **Security** that should be implemented in an ongoing basis
- Preparation for **threats and hazards** that are unique to a HoW

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Active Shooter Situations

The recent increase – and devastating consequences – of active shooter incidents at faith-based organizations make them a growing threat that necessitates a closer look. As such, a HoW EOP should have an active shooter section that includes a well-documented site assessment to be shared with first responders. This section should address:

- **Exercises** to prepare staff and – when appropriate – congregants for active shooter incidents
- **Warning signs** to look for that signal an active shooter situation may develop
- **Courses of action** detailing how staff and congregants can most effectively respond to an active shooter, including:
 - Training
 - Hide
 - Run
 - Fight
- **Post event coordination** with first responders

Get started today for a safer tomorrow

While there's no denying that religious facilities are increasingly at risk as hate crimes and active shooter incidents continue to grow, an EOP can greatly help mitigate these risks by documenting how to prepare for, respond to, and recover from emergency situations.

As the nation's leading security integrator with dedicated local teams, Johnson Controls can help you identify security gaps at your HoW with a free expert review.

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