



# Emergency Response Plan Guidance

## CREATING AN EMERGENCY RESPONSE PLAN

Every place of business, including Housing Counseling Agencies, should have an emergency response plan to ensure the safety of staff and clients in the event of an emergency. An emergency response plan details the immediate actions to take to protect lives, avoid injuries, and stabilize the incident.

- **Step 1: Don't start from scratch.** [Ready.gov](#) and the [Federal Emergency Management Agency \(FEMA\)](#) have useful resources and guidance for creating an emergency response plan. Review these resources and use them to guide your planning.
- **Step 2: Identify risks.** Conduct a risk assessment to identify possible emergency situations. Consider the types of hazards common in your community and the likely impacts on your operations. Natural hazards (e.g., floods, hurricanes, wildfires, landslides, winter storms, tornadoes, earthquakes, tsunamis) or other human-caused threats, such as terrorism, cyberattacks, or large-scale power outages, can not only threaten human life and result in property damage but also can result in long-term disruptions to operations. Assess your agency's vulnerability to these hazards by:
  - Partnering with local public emergency services (i.e., emergency management agency, and fire, police, and emergency medical services) to identify hazards.
  - Listing the types of hazards that could affect your agency.
  - Touring your agency's facility to identify how it may be affected in an emergency.
  - Identifying what you will need to continue operations after an emergency.
  - Identifying how your client information systems may be affected in an emergency.
  - Reviewing your agency's insurance policy and making sure that your coverage is adequate.
  - Meeting with staff to identify any additional risks that they may have uncovered.
- **Step 3: Develop a plan.** Engage a team and use the [planning template](#) to consider responses.
  - Assess agency capacity (i.e., people, systems, security, and equipment) for "incident stabilization."
  - Connect with local public emergency services (i.e., emergency management agency, and fire, police, and emergency medical services) to determine the following:
    - Response time to your facility
    - Knowledge of your facility and its hazards
    - Capabilities for stabilizing an emergency at your facility
    - Ability to coordinate with your agency for emergency planning and incident stabilization
  - Develop "protective actions for life safety" (e.g., evacuation, shelter, shelter-in-place, lockdown).



# HOUSING COUNSELING DISASTER RECOVERY TOOLKIT



- Develop hazard- and threat-specific emergency procedures. For each threat-specific emergency, consider the following:
  - How is the emergency response triggered?
  - Who communicates it?
  - What teams of people implement the action?
  - What are the procedures?
- Institute procedures for notifying HUD's Office of Housing Counseling of "inactive status" if your agency is unable to perform business.
- Establish procedures for emergency plan and Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP) activation.
- Consider systems to put in place:
  - Emergency notification system, including key personnel contact numbers and a phone tree (see [Appendix 2](#))
  - Protection of files and documents through electronic backups
  - Fire protection, such as smoke detectors, alarms, and fire extinguishers
  - Emergency teams, including trained staff, who know their roles and responsibilities during an emergency
  - Communications and training for staff regarding emergency actions
  - Procedures for securing the building and all assets
- **Step 4: Keep the plan current.** Update your emergency plan at least on an annual basis.
  - You will need to account for changes in personnel, and to keep your emergency team fully staffed.
  - Address any changes in your situation, such as changes in location, expansions, and new developments in your community.
  - Make your plan accessible. Distribute it to all staff and make sure that they know where to find it. Keep a copy offsite as well, in case the emergency makes your site inaccessible.
- **Step 5: Stay prepared.** Keep facilities and staff prepared so that your emergency plan can be activated at any time:
  - Maintain facility preparedness. Regularly test fire extinguishers and smoke alarms to ensure that they are in working order.
  - Keep emergency supplies. Your facility should have a first aid kit and at least two weeks of emergency supplies for staff and clients. See the emergency supplies list provided in [Appendix 1](#).
  - Train staff regularly. Remind staff of their responsibilities through regular training exercises and updates at staff meetings.
  - Maintain an up-to-date phone tree. See sample phone trees in [Appendix 2](#).



**Tasks:** When the COOP is activated, personnel should carry out the following tasks to ensure operations:

- All personnel will take laptops, phones, and necessary files with them (if time and safety precautions allow).
- **[HR Manager]** prepares and distributes a schedule that allows for the rotation of personnel so that they can secure personal property and family at home.
- **[HR Manager]** forwards phone lines to designated staff.



## APPENDIX 1: PERSONAL EMERGENCY DISASTER KIT AND INVENTORY LIST

In addition to agency preparedness, it is important for agency staff to be personally prepared for emergencies. Distribute this emergency disaster kit and inventory list to your staff to ensure that they are prepared for a potential disaster. Some of these emergency supplies may be helpful to keep in the office as well.

### **Emergency Supplies**

- First aid kit
- Flashlight (with extra batteries)
- Bottled water (you will need at least one gallon per person per day)
- Nonperishable food, including a can opener and a bottle opener
- Toiletries, including toilet paper, paper towels, hand sanitizer, and diapers
- Blankets and pillows
- 30-gallon trash bags
- 3.5-millimeter clear plastic sheeting
- Packing tape
- General purpose duct tape
- Utility knife

### **Emergency Equipment**

- Alternative power sources, including generators and batteries
- Camera or cellphone to document damage for insurance claims
- Battery and/or hand crank-operated radio
- Corded telephone with a hardline
- Extension cords, Category 5 patch cables

### **Other Important Emergency Kit Items**

- Hard copies of important financial information (e.g., wills, insurance policies, contracts, deeds, stocks/bonds, car titles, pay stubs, tax forms, bank account numbers, passports, Social Security cards, immunization records, inventory of household valuables, checkbooks)
- Maps of the service area
- Laptop(s) and/or portable electronic devices



## APPENDIX 2: ORGANIZATION EMERGENCY COMMUNICATION GUIDANCE

Your emergency plan should include a system to communicate information and assignments before, during, and after an emergency. Effective communication plans should include:

- Established procedures for both internal and external communications – who, what, and when
- Communication channels with external organizations (e.g., local public emergency services and media) for contact during and after the crisis
- Multiple means of messaging to create redundancy
- The ability to have two-way communication
- Staff education about the communication plan
- Flexibility to change messaging
- Regularly updated list of staff contact information
- Clear guidance on creating and implementing communication trees

**Communication Methods.** Your agency communications strategy should incorporate a combination of communication methods in the event that some methods fail during an emergency. These may include:

- **Communication Trees:** Communication trees are a low-tech strategy for connecting with staff, assuming that phones are operational. A communication tree requires a hierarchy in which a lead staff member contacts a list of designated primary staff who then contact a designated list of secondary staff. See examples below.
- **Email:** If email is operational and you can ensure that staff have access to email, this may be the simplest method for contacting all staff. Email lists should be created in advance, prior to any emergency, to include everyone who should receive the email.
- **Hotlines:** Hotline numbers can be used by staff for receiving a prerecorded message that communicates general information.
- **Apps:** Apps can be purchased for staff to download and receive alerts on phones or other mobile devices.
- **Automatic Messaging Systems:** Automatic messaging systems can be purchased and set up prior to an emergency. In the event of an emergency, lead staff provide the automatic messaging system with general disaster information that the system will share with staff.
- **Websites and Social Media:** An agency website or social media account (e.g., Facebook or Twitter) can be used to communicate important emergency information to staff and clients. Local emergency management agencies may have up-to-date emergency information on websites, or communicated through Twitter or phone text messages.

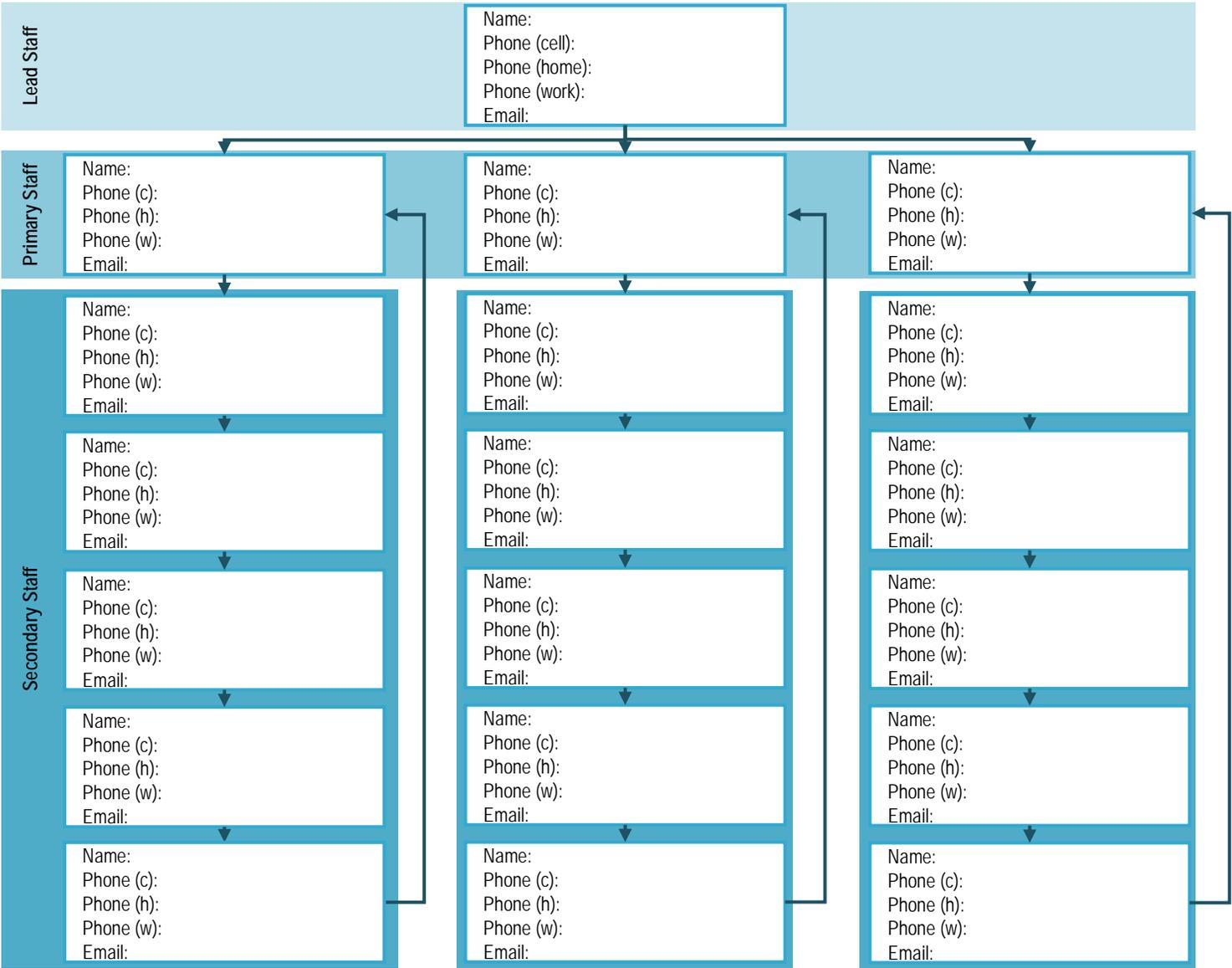


**Sample Communication Trees.** Communication trees can be created in Microsoft Word or Excel. See examples below. Effective trees include names, phone numbers, clear sequencing of calls, and responsibility for the calls.

- **Example 1:** In Microsoft Word or Excel, create a table with the following features:

	Name	Phone (cell)	Phone (home)	Phone (work)	Email
<b>1. Lead Staff</b>					
<b>2. Primary Staff</b>					
<b>3. Secondary Staff</b>					
<b>4. Secondary Staff</b>					

- **Example 2:** Create a diagram like the one below:





## APPENDIX 3: EMERGENCY WALLET CARD

Instruct your staff to fill out and print the card below to keep in their wallets for use in an emergency. The card should include the following details:

- **Emergency Contact Information:** Keep emergency contact information handy in case you need to get in contact with a loved one quickly and you don't have a working cell phone or access to other typical means of communication.
- **Emergency Supply Kit Checklist:** Use this list at the store while buying supply items or as a quick reminder during an evacuation.
- **Where to Meet in Case of an Emergency:** Establish a meeting place with your family or loved ones to ensure that you have a coordinated plan to find each other when disaster strikes.
- **Blood Type:** Find out and write down your blood type information in advance, in case you need to donate blood or a medical professional needs to know your blood type.
- **Allergy Information:** Keep a record of your allergy information in case a medical professional needs to access it in an emergency.

<p><b>Emergency Preparedness Wallet Card</b></p> <p>Emergency Contact Name: _____</p> <p>Phone/email: _____</p> <p>Address: _____</p> <p><b>Emergency Supply Kit Checklist</b> </p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td><input type="checkbox"/> ID Card</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Whistle</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Dust Mask</td> </tr> <tr> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Wallet</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Radio</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Local Maps</td> </tr> <tr> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Keys</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> First Aid Kit</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Can Opener</td> </tr> <tr> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Water</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Flashlight</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Batteries</td> </tr> <tr> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Cell phone</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Medications</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Local Maps</td> </tr> </table>	<input type="checkbox"/> ID Card	<input type="checkbox"/> Whistle	<input type="checkbox"/> Dust Mask	<input type="checkbox"/> Wallet	<input type="checkbox"/> Radio	<input type="checkbox"/> Local Maps	<input type="checkbox"/> Keys	<input type="checkbox"/> First Aid Kit	<input type="checkbox"/> Can Opener	<input type="checkbox"/> Water	<input type="checkbox"/> Flashlight	<input type="checkbox"/> Batteries	<input type="checkbox"/> Cell phone	<input type="checkbox"/> Medications	<input type="checkbox"/> Local Maps	<p><b>Emergency Preparedness Wallet Card</b></p> <p> Where to meet in case of an emergency: _____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Blood Type: _____</p> <p>Allergy Information: _____</p> <p>_____</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> ID Card	<input type="checkbox"/> Whistle	<input type="checkbox"/> Dust Mask														
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