

CRITICAL Ways to Prepare for Healthcare Facility Emergencies



Emergency Preparedness: Critical Planning for Healthcare Facilities

The Pandemic and the recent rise in active shootings have changed everything about hospital emergency preparedness – from protocols to PPE to patients.



Hospital teams – already stressed, understaffed and overworked – are doing more with less, stretching resources and learning to adapt.

The Pandemic has changed how technology is used in hospital emergency scenarios, impacting everything from gathering statistics, to reconfiguring hospital spaces, to managing hygiene protocols.

When emergencies require the immediate action of first responders to quickly assess building conditions and help people as quickly as possible, there's a problem that stands in their way -- little to no inside building knowledge, which is why sharing building and emergency information with first responders,

fire departments, police departments, administrators and facility is critically important.

Hospital facility teams, equipped with mobile devices, can quickly share building drawings so outside responders know where chemicals are stored and where entrances and exits are located for evacuation routes.

It's hard to predict the rate and frequency of emergencies, but we know their impact are costly in terms of time, money and impact on patient care.

In this whitepaper, we're going to do a deep dive into critical ways to prepare for healthcare facilities emergencies.

When an emergency strikes and lives are at stake, communities rely on healthcare providers. For healthcare facilities, an emergency is any event that affects the facility's ability to provide medical care. In a hospital, emergency preparedness requires extensive planning, documentation and communication. **Because of this, facility managers at hospitals must make special preparations.**

The National Fire Protection Agency (NFPA) breaks hospital emergencies into three categories: natural disasters, man-made disasters and technological disasters.¹

5 Critical Functions for Continuing Medical Care

“The list of hazards that facility managers face is almost limitless.”

The list of hazards that facility managers face is almost limitless. A key principle of hospital emergency preparation lies in identifying the critical functions that allow hospitals to continue providing medical care, based on the facility team’s expertise and knowledge. This plan must be quickly accessible, easy to update and flexible.

Here are five key emergency preparation functions:



To comply with the rules, facilities teams must have a plan to maintain critical functions. Facility managers leverage their expertise and knowledge to develop these plans, which must also be quickly accessible, easy to update, and flexible. But, without the ability to quickly facilitate responses to unforeseen hazards during an emergency, even the most well-written plans are useless.

Hospital Emergencies

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The types of emergencies that hospitals must prepare for depend on many factors. Proximity to airports, nuclear power plants, local weather patterns, and more will inform the emergency response.

1. Natural Disasters

Any hospital that stays open during a natural disaster immediately becomes critical to the survival of the community. A natural disaster may damage utilities, transportation networks, equipment and the structure itself.

In addition to preparing for the threat to property from a natural disaster, emergency managers must plan for a large influx of patients. Otherwise, the hospital may have to evacuate, which is a difficult and risky option for staff and patients.²

2. Man-made Disasters

Whether intentional or accidental, man-made disasters, like terrorist attacks and plane crashes, also demand immediate care for new patients.

For any event that threatens hospital security, emergency managers need to a plan to control access to and from the facility. But most hospitals don't have the resources or expertise to handle massive crowd or vehicular traffic control. This is where coordination with first responders becomes vital to ensure patient and staff safety.

Similarly, a hazardous material threat is best controlled with a plan to prevent contaminants from spreading. In fact, OSHA requires hospitals to document in their Emergency Response Plans, how they plan to access information about toxic materials when responding to a hazardous substance incident.³

3. Technological Disasters

Both man-made and natural disasters could result in a technological disaster. Even by itself, a technological disaster threatens a hospital's ability to continue providing patient care.

4. Ransomware

Last year the FBI issued a notice to healthcare that hackers were targeting healthcare specifically. Imagine how devastating it could be if a Ransomware attack happened during a natural or man-made disaster. If a hospital shuts down its computers, how are emergency plans accessed without server access?

Ransomware attacks on hospitals have devastating impacts, including costly loss of data and recovery. These incidents, which are growing in frequency and magnitude, impact many computers and spread across networks. Cyber preparedness is a growing issue in cities and facilities across the country. By moving emergency planning info to the cloud and making it accessible via mobile devices, hospitals are in better shape to avert both man-made and natural disasters.⁴

Facility managers and others must plan to provide backup communication systems and backup generators. This plan could include details about what backup systems are available or how to protect existing backup systems.

5 Critical Functions and the Facility Manager's Role



The facility manager plays a pivotal role in every stage of an emergency – from preparing and responding, to mitigating damage and recovering. But no hospital can be prepared for all hazards.

With that in mind, emergency managers need a flexible framework from which to respond to emergencies. Emergency preparation should be based off a “**hazard vulnerability analysis**” that identifies potential hazards and the resulting effect on the hospital’s ability to provide services.⁵

Identifying suitable safe refuge areas, decontamination stations and creating backup power procedures are among the list of tasks that require the expertise of a seasoned facility manager.

1. Communications

Communication with staff, local authorities, patients, families, suppliers, media, and other hospitals should be coordinated through one central department. Emergency managers must also establish backups to existing communication systems.

2. Resources and assets

The NFPA Code states that “**a facility shall maintain a current, documented inventory of the assets and resources it has on-site that would be needed during an emergency.**”⁶ Also, hospital staff needs support systems in place which may include housing, communication to family, and transportation.

3. Safety and security

Access to and from the hospital must be controlled. Emergency managers need a plan to implement internal security to control patients who may wander. They must know how to coordinate with first responders ahead of time.

4. Essential utilities

There must be a plan in place for any of the following systems being lost: electricity, water, drinking water, HVAC, fire protection systems, fuel, and any other essential utilities.

5. Staff roles

The plan spells out everyone’s role in each aspect of the emergency. The NFPA states, “**Written plans should be designed to direct staff in each department on actions to take in different types of emergencies.**”⁷

Many believe there is more work to be done to prepare their workforce for a catastrophe, including fast access to information. According to a 2017 AIIM & ARC Survey, nearly 90% of facility managers acknowledge that they do not have access to facility information.

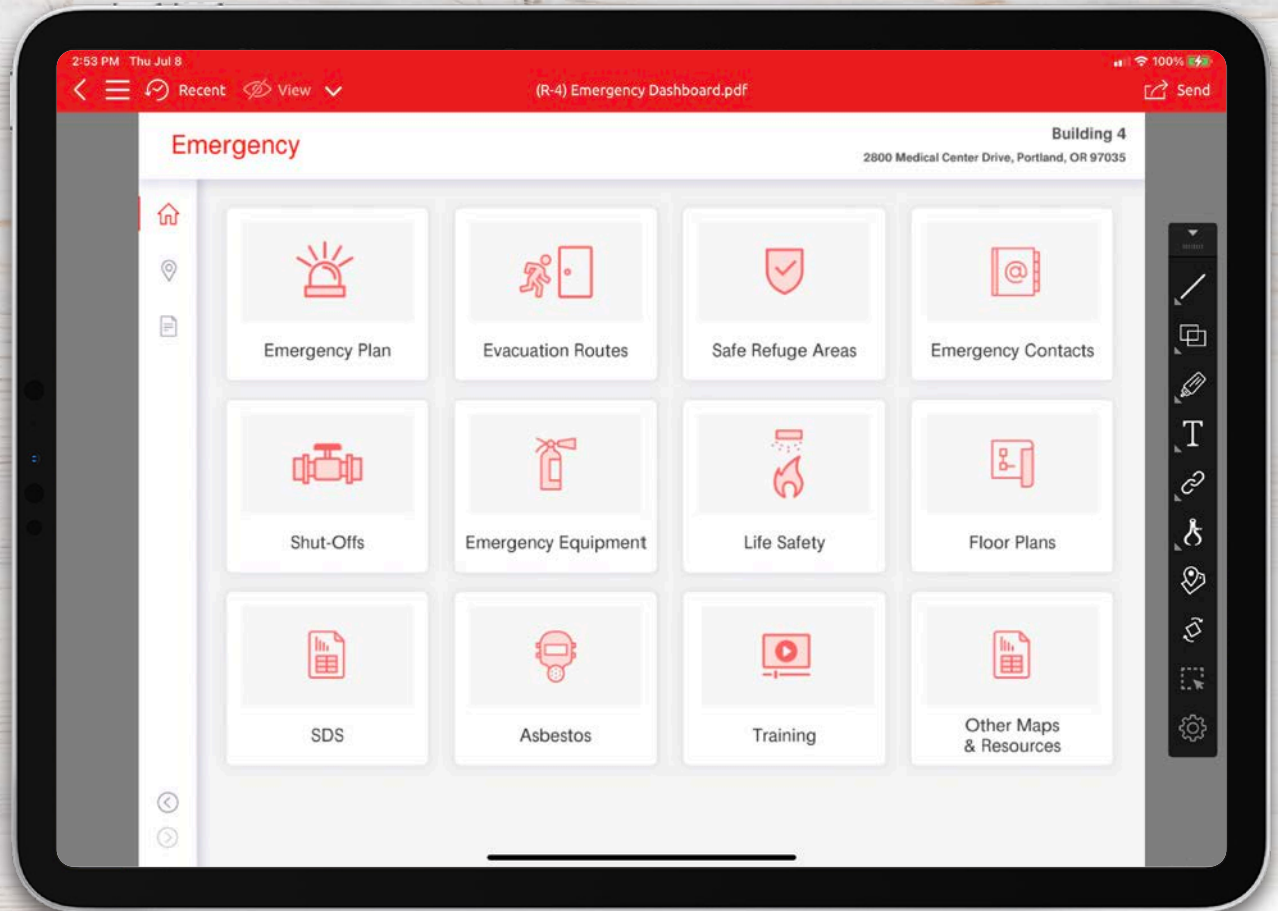


Using Technology to Optimize Emergency Preparedness

Developing emergency preparedness plans is a daunting undertaking in and of itself. Hospital facilities managers must ensure their plans meet strict compliance requirements specific to healthcare.

The emergency manager's ability to leverage facility information will determine success or failure in an emergency response. Yet even when facility information is properly leveraged, a challenge remains: communication.

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The Problem with Paper

Many factors, including the Pandemic, are helping drive hospitals to go digital to minimize multiple contacts with paper. But most hospitals still use binders filled with compliance documents, completed repair reports, inspection logs and other information which must be shared with surveyors.

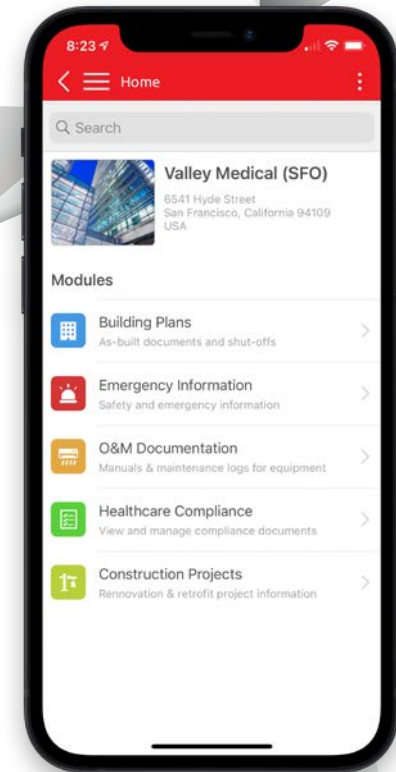


Over the years, many healthcare facilities have digitized the maintenance and inspection reports on equipment. There has never been a good way to connect these documents efficiently to support a survey.

Cloud and mobile technology available today can help hospital facility directors improve productivity, minimize contact with paper and provide critical building data to all those who need it anytime, anywhere in the event of emergencies.

The time-consuming process of photocopying reports, inserting documents into binders, and adding new information manually is fraught with human error.

Cloud-based technology addresses this communication challenge with secure storage of emergency plans. Combined with mobile access to those plans during emergencies, this technology equips facility managers to launch into immediate action.



Hospitals are adopting cloud-based solutions to ensure secure digital storage of critical emergency plans and provide mobile access to speed response time in emergency situations - when every second is critical.



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