

## Utilization of Emergency Action Plans by Collegiate Academic Recreation Programs

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### Abstract

Emergency Action Plans (EAP) provide detailed instructions for handling emergency situations including natural disasters, major injuries and illnesses within recreational academic programs. The purpose of this project was to determine if accredited university recreation programs utilize an EAP for recreation courses and secondarily what components of an EAP are included and the process for development and implementation. Twenty-four surveys were returned (25% return rate) from a national sample of 95 accredited recreation education programs. Seventy-five percent of (n=18) programs indicated that they did not require any type of emergency management training for their recreation faculty. None of the programs had all

recommended elements of an EAP and 62.5% (n=15) reportedly do not have an EAP in place for the recreation education department/program. Recreation organizations should encourage academic institutions to value emergency management certifications for their faculty and advocate the emphasis and implementation of EAPs in academic recreation programs.

**KEYWORDS:** Emergency action plans, risk management, emergency preparedness, collegiate academic recreation programs, injury prevention

## Introduction

Emergency action plans (EAPs) provide detailed instructions for handling emergency situations including natural disasters, major injuries, and illnesses. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration's (OSHA) regulation 1910.32 requires all schools and businesses to have a written EAP and make it available for all employees to review. OSHA strongly encourages organizations to train all employees so that they know how to implement the plan to ensure the safety of workers, students, customers, and event participants when incidents arise (U.S. Department of Labor, 2002).

If organizations fail to develop, periodically review, and follow the procedures outlined in the EAP appropriately, the potential for life-threatening situations increases along with the chance of litigation (Andersen, Courson, Kleiner, & McLoda, 2002). In the *Kleinknecht v Gettysburg College* case, a lacrosse player at Gettysburg College died from sudden cardiac arrest. Though the college asserted that the EAP was implemented, the school was found liable for failing to meet the duty of care required for a recruited student-athlete given the foreseeability of a life-threatening injury (United States Court of Appeals Third Circuit, 1993). The issue was not that the EAP was not implemented, but that there were delays and problems with the plan.

More recently, a senior in outdoor studies from Ohio University had an epileptic seizure and fell face first into a campfire and suffered severe burns while left alone as part of a university outdoor survival course. His epilepsy had been reported on a required pre-trip medical form. Apparently his anti-convulsive medication was less effective on the trip because his eating and sleeping patterns were altered. The family filed suit against the university (Terry, 2008) and eventually received a \$500,000 settlement from the university (Ludlow, 2009).

Incidents such as these demonstrate the need for employees to not only familiarize themselves with their organization's EAP, but to also rehearse the plan so that they know what to do in the event of an emergency situation and thereby can help to decrease the chance of legal action. Elsberry (1999) showed that while many organizations have written EAPs that may look thorough and appropriate, they have never been tested in a real or a simulated situation. Because the plans have not been practiced, they may not be effective in an emergency situation. If EAPs are not regularly reviewed and tested, they can become outdated. Even worse than an ineffective plan is that personnel may not be familiar with the plan and are therefore unable to implement it properly (Kennedy, 2005).

Miller and Rushing (2002) attest that supervisors have a legal, ethical, and moral responsibility to make risk management, including an EAP, a high priority because the plan can increase the safety of participants. While many supervisors understand the need for an EAP, they often do not allocate enough time to adequately prepare, review, and rehearse the plan (Appenzeller, 2005).

Review and rehearsal of the plan allows employees to amend the plan to address any weaknesses (Morganti, 2003). A rapid, coordinated response is more likely when all personnel know the plan (Kennedy, 2005). Anderson, et al. (2002) recommend having a lawyer or an organization's risk manager review the EAP to help protect schools from litigation and liability. Pulley (2006) found that very few collegiate athletic programs have EAPs reviewed by risk managers (36%) or lawyers (<5%). She also noted that one school surveyed did not have a plan for regular review of their EAP, which made it non-compliant with OSHA regulation 1910.32

### ***EAPs in Academic Recreation Programs***

Although universities as a whole may have an EAP, it is difficult to find the existence of EAPs in individual academic programs. The Council on Accreditation (2004), sponsored by the National Recreation and Park Association, reviews recreation, park, and leisure service undergraduate academic programs to ensure their quality. They examine the curriculum, the facilities, credentials of faculty members, and resources allocated to the program. One of the curricular requirements is that students learn emergency and risk management principles. Standard 8.27 states that the curriculum should include "Understanding the principles and practices of safety, emergency, and risk management related to recreation, park resources, and leisure services. *Content to consider: Components of risk management planning; emergency procedures; safety/law enforcement*" (Council on Accreditation, 2004, p. 16). It is interesting to note that while the Council requires that students must learn about principles and practices of emergency management, there is no requirement for the academic unit to model such practices by having an EAP in place. Moreover, there are no requirements regarding safety during any off-campus field trips, and there are no required certifications in first aid and/or CPR for faculty members (Council on Accreditation, 2004).

Although the Council on Accreditation standards do not address EAPs for the academic program outside of classroom instruction, there is a need for educators to incorporate appropriate procedures and precautions when they lead recreation and physical activities (Miller & Rushing, 2002). In distinct difference, university academic programs seeking accreditation with the Wilderness Education Association are required to have "an Emergency Action Plan (EAP)... in place that can be executed in case of an emergency" (Wilderness Education Association, 2009, p.32). The Association for Experiential Education (AEE) also requires an EAP in their accreditation program. The explanation of Standard 4.13 clarifies that an

emergency action plan includes, but is not limited to, first aid protocols, field notification procedures for leaders to contact management or request assistance, evacuation procedures for self evacuation and/or requesting additional assistance such as helicopters or other agencies, procedures for contacting area emergency

medical services, and serious injury or fatality protocols. (Association for Experiential Education, 2009, Para.20).

Other outdoor recreation and education programs have addressed the need for plans in the event of emergencies. The National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS) annually hosts the Wilderness Risk Management Conference, which covers a variety of topics including emergency response (Leeman, 2008; National Outdoor Leadership School, 2009).

Specific to the field of recreation, research supports the inherent risks associated with instructor-led outdoor trips. Researchers found that injury, evacuation, and near-miss rates for autonomous student expeditions (0.56 injury reports/1,000 program days; 0.28 evacuation reports/1,000 program days; 1.56 near-miss reports/1,000 program days) are statistically similar to trips taken with instructors (1.40 injury reports/1,000 program days; 0.98 evacuation reports 1,000 program days; 1.19 near-miss reports/1,000 program days) in analysis of data from the National Outdoor Leadership School collected over a period of two years (Sibthorp, Paisley, Gookin, & Furman, 2008). While there is significant support for EAPs in the outdoor recreation field, there are no standards across the board to require EAPs for universities with academic outdoor recreation programs to have an EAP in place even though there is evidence of similar risk.

To minimize the anticipated risk involved within an academic recreation program, the following topics, summarized from the literature, are recommended for inclusion in the EAP of all organizations and businesses.

1. Evaluating environmental and safety hazards and create plans to minimize the potential for harm from those hazards (Hamel, 2004; Morganti, 2003; U.S. Department of Labor, 2002).
2. Location of emergency equipment including a plan for inventory of CPR masks and first aid supplies/kits, and testing AEDs, telephones, and fire extinguishers (U.S. Department of Labor, 2002).
3. Employees trained in First Aid/Universal Precautions, CPR, and AEDs (Ramaswamy & Page, 2003; U.S. Department of Labor, 2002).
4. Communication plan (NOLS, 2008; Western Kentucky University Staff Council, 2008)
5. Creation of an Emergency Response Team (ERT) to respond quickly in crisis situations (Morganti, 2003; Hamel, 2004).
6. Planned access to a medical facility (U.S. Department of Labor, 2002)
7. Inclement Weather and Natural Disaster Policies (U.S. Department of Labor, 2002)
8. Employee review and understanding of the plan (Kennedy, 2005; Morganti, 2003; U.S. Department of Labor, 2002).
9. Alarm systems with multiple alarm types for fire, tornados, etc. that are at least six decibels louder than the ambient noise in a given area (U.S. Department of Labor, 2002)

Some components of item 2 and item 9, such as fire extinguisher testing and alarm systems, may filter into the recreation program EAP from, or may be identified at, an institutional level. This allows the recreation program EAP to focus on specific needs of anticipating potential risks in their courses since the risks associated with recreation programs vary by location, activity and by conditions at the time an activity is scheduled.

Although there are many recommendations for written EAPs, there are some discrepancies in organizational implementation of EAPs in a variety of university settings (Appenzeller, 2005; Elsberry, 1999; Kennedy, 2005; Pulley, 2006). The purpose of this project was to determine if accredited recreation programs at colleges and universities across the country utilize an emergency action plan for their on-campus and off-campus recreation courses. Additionally, the authors hoped to gain insight on the components of the EAP and the process for development and implementation.

## Methods

After Institutional Review Board approval was granted for this study, surveys were mailed, along with a letter of request to participate, to 95 accredited collegiate recreation education programs with a postage-paid return envelope. Accredited recreation programs were identified from the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) website. Additionally, reminder emails were sent one month after the original mailing.

The survey was based on emergency action planning/risk management planning recommendations from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, the National Athletic Trainers Association, The National Collegiate Athletics Association and a previous study by Pulley (2006) which included many of the suggestions listed in the introduction. Additionally, experts in recreation education and wilderness medicine reviewed and edited the survey to ensure its relevancy to the recreation field.

Content of the survey was specific to the academic programs and did not include questions directed towards campus recreation. The survey investigated the certifications held by faculty; evidence of emergency action plans; and equipment, policy and procedures for such plans. On-campus courses were defined as day trips with no overnight stay, whereas off-campus courses were extended excursions with at least one overnight stay. Data were analyzed descriptively utilizing SPSS for Windows, Rel. 17.0.0. 2008.

## Results

Twenty-four of 95 surveys were returned for a 25% return rate. Institution size as reported by participants were nine schools with <9,000 students, six schools with 10,000-19,000 students, three schools with 20,000-29,000 and 30,000-39,000 students, and one school with >40,000 students. The number of full and part-time recreation faculty members employed by institution can be found in Figure 1. Over half of the participants (n=15, 62.5%) indicated that their institution offered an outdoor recreation option within their recreation program. There were a wide variety of options within the recreation major reported with only three participants (12.5%) indicating that they offered only a general recreation major. All other programs had a combination of general recreation, therapeutic recreation, outdoor recreation, sport administration, tourism and others unspecified options. Program membership in professional organizations can be found in Figure 2.

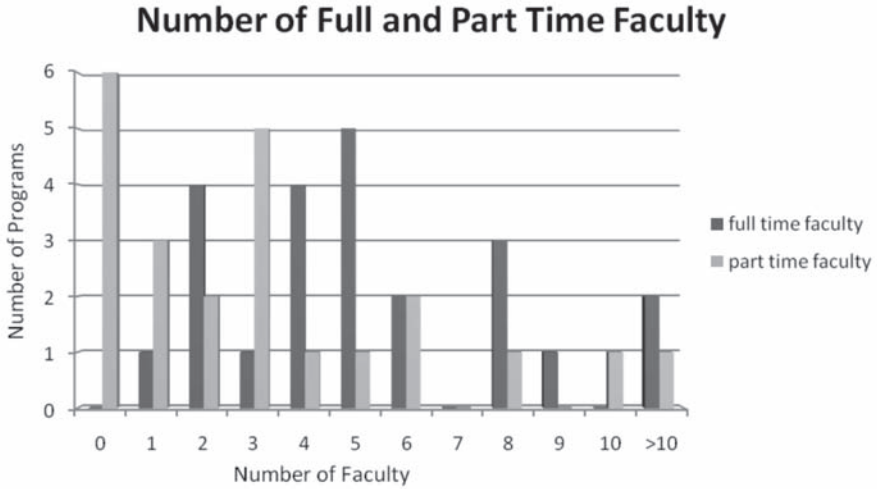


FIGURE 1. Reported number of full and part time faculty by participating program.  
 Note: Missing data from one participant. (N=23)

### Program Membership in Professional Organizations

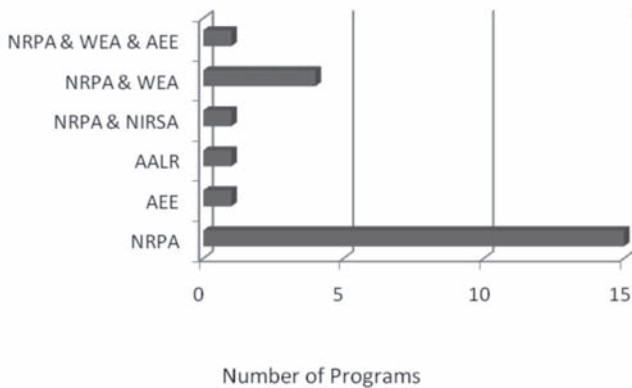


FIGURE 2. Recreation Program Memberships in the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), Wilderness Education Association (WEA), American Association for Leisure and Recreation (AALR), Association for Experiential Education (AEE), National Intramural-Recreational Sports Association (NIRSA)

### ***Certifications***

Seventy-five percent (n=18) of programs indicated that they did not require any type of certification in basic first aid, cardiopulmonary resuscitation, or automated external defibrillation (CPR/AED), or wilderness first aid/responder for the faculty in their recreation education programs. Four programs did require some combination of basic first aid, CPR/AED, while two programs required basic first aid, CPR/AED in conjunction with either wilderness first aid/responder certification. Although the majority of programs (75%) did not require certifications for their faculty, it appears that most faculty do hold some form of certification in CPR/AED, first aid, or wilderness first aid/responder since all but six programs reported at least one certification held by at least one faculty member. Five programs reported faculty with only basic first aid and/or CPR certification, while the remaining programs (n=13) reported that faculty had at least one certification in wilderness first responder or wilderness first aid.

### ***Emergency Supplies and Preparation***

First aid kits were provided for 66.7% (n=16) of programs for use in their recreation courses. Of those programs, all but one program reported re-evaluating the first aid kit contents prior to class trips to ensure adequate stocking. Fifteen of 24 (62.5%) of the programs participating in the survey indicated that participants in recreation courses were required to sign an assumption of risk waiver prior to participation in course activities. Additionally, 54.2% (n=13) of programs required participants to complete a medical history form before participation.

### ***Emergency Action Plans***

Alarming, 62.5% (n=15) responded that they do not have an EAP (risk management plan) in place for the recreation education department/program. Six of the nine programs with an EAP in place indicated that they do not train or review with their faculty members how to utilize or implement the EAP. Only one of these nine programs utilized a medical advisor to evaluate and approve the EAP. No medical advisors were reported to provide an extended scope of practice. Six programs reported that the EAP was specific to on-campus recreation courses while five programs were specific to off-campus recreation courses in their EAP. Among those faculty who possessed wilderness certifications, though not required to be certified, 46.2% (n=6) reported having an EAP in their program and over half (53.8%, n=7) had no emergency action plan (EAP). Cellular phones were the primary means of emergency communication written into the EAP for seven of the nine schools, yet only two of these institutions provided cell phones for work-related responsibilities.

When asked about how often the program reviews the EAP for comprehensiveness and function, three participants reported that their EAP was routinely reviewed (either annually or biannually). Two on-campus EAPs and two off-campus EAPs were reported to be evaluated only as needed while two on-campus EAPs and one off-campus EAP were reportedly not ever reviewed. There appears to be a relatively even split between reviewing the EAP and not reviewing the EAP, regardless of on-campus or off-campus components.

## Discussion and Conclusions

As stated previously, there are numerous examples citing the importance of having an emergency action/risk management plan for businesses, academic institutions and professional fields where there is an inherent risk to employees, students, or participants. Specific to the field of recreation, research supports the inherent risks associated with instructor lead outdoor trips (Sibthorp, Paisley, Gookin, & Furman, 2008). Given this fact, one would surmise that academic recreation programs would place an importance on the instruction and practical development and implementation of EAPs. The results of this study did not reflect that assumption as 62.5% (n=15) of programs participating in this study did not have an EAP.

Comparing the results of this study to previous research related to academic recreation programs is difficult due to the sparse research in this area. However, in a related study of academic physical education programs, Miller and Rushing (2002) found that 66% of surveyed programs did not have a written risk management plan, which is a similar outcome to the current study. Based on the results of this study, the authors believe there appears to be a need for a greater emphasis on practicing emergency planning and risk management to anticipate emergency response within academic recreation programs as well as more accessible guidelines from professional organizations.

It is evident that, for most programs, basic supplies needed for first aid are readily available at least minimally meeting the recommendations for emergency supplies (U.S. Department of Labor, 2002). Additionally, this study found most academic recreation programs rely on cellular phones as their primary means of communication during an outdoor program class, yet only two programs provided the phones to meet this requirement. Although it is commonplace for most people to have a personal cell phone, the equipment required to carry out the emergency plan should be provided to the employee, whether it be rubber gloves, an AED, or a cell phone. The burden should not be placed on the employee to meet this need of the workplace EAP.

Many academic departments appear to not value emergency management certifications such as first aid or CPR/AED, as qualifications for recreation faculty members. This could contribute to the lack of EAPs at the surveyed programs. This raises the question of whether or not academic departments are responsible for requiring faculty to practice what a professional in recreation should practice. While several outdoor recreation and education related organizations and accreditation programs recommend or require some type of EAP to be in place, interestingly, over half of the participants reporting faculty who have outdoor certifications that emphasize emergency management report no EAP in place (AEE, 2009; NOLS, 2008; WEA, 2009).

Equally important is that programs that have an EAP in place most likely do not review their EAP regularly, if at all, nor do faculty members get training to implement the EAP. Each of these actions leaves the institution open to litigation similar to the *Kleinknecht v Gettysburg College* case presented previously where foreseeability of harm was central to the outcome (United States Court of Appeals Third Circuit, 1993). It is prudent to not only have an EAP in place, but also to review, practice and ensure that the processes within the plan actually work.



Developing and implementing EAPs will not only reduce the liability of the institution, it can also provide a real-life learning experience for recreation students in reviewing and implementing an EAP. Active learning experiences involving existing EAPs can assist in meeting the Council on Accreditation standard for instruction on risk management planning (Council on Accreditation, 2004, p. 16).

Future studies should investigate the actual emergency supplies available to programs, the disjoint of the emphasis encountered during an outdoor certification program and the action of developing, reviewing and implementing an EAP in the academic program. Professional recreation organizations such as the Wilderness Education Association, the Association for Experiential Education and the National Recreation and Park Association should encourage academic institutions to value emergency management certifications for their faculty and advocate the emphasis and implementation of EAPs in academic recreation programs.

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