

EP's Not Going Away

Emergency Planning for Rural Health Clinics



Gloom frequently is the descriptive term for weather throughout the year, or at least a self-prescribed portrayal by all of us expert, amateur meteorologists. The past few months, gloom has transitioned beyond weather, although none of us escape the irony that weather is acutely entrenched in the new source of this gloom. We all assumed...hoped...maybe even prayed it would go away, while a deafening percentage seemed to ignore the *emergency preparedness regulations*.

Maybe it just got away from many of us, as fast-paced, demanding days turned into months, turned into years, turned into... 'Oh darn!' I DID say years by the way! This regulation has been in the works that long, actually becoming effective in 2016!! Since November 2017, surveyors are asking about elements of the regulation like emergency plans, hazard vulnerability assessments, policies, exercises and documentation of training for all of it! As it turns out...ignorance is not bliss.

So, what now? Throw in the towel? If you're one who ignored, procrastinated or got a surprise from a surveyor; is it time to go to work on emergency planning?

There is endless information about emergency planning. ...black hole, quick sand, drowning...all descriptions I've heard. I can share a long, five-page, 2,000-word document; jam-packed into an outline of a 700-page regulation. But just what do you need? So, let's get focused.

- ✓ Written emergency policy & procedure,
- ✓ Risk assessments - 2: one community-based (someone else's), one facility-based (yours); commonly referred to as a HVA (Hazard Vulnerability Assessment),
- ✓ Call everyone you know in an emergency agency, or maybe in any way related or know someone in emergency management,
- ✓ Training of the written policy and procedures with employees,
- ✓ Two exercises: **one** full-scale, hands on, multi-agency, etc. based in your community, *then one* of your choice (full-scale community-based or facility-based, or tabletop exercise)

Of course, I'm not suggesting you could achieve all of these requirements without at least speed reading the regulation, interpretive guidelines, and maybe a glance at that five-page outline. There are many substantive details your clinics will need to include in your emergency plans. Be sure to document everything!!!

There is help and resources out there. Figuring out where to start seems to have presented more challenge than I think most expected. We have received feedback from surveys. They're out there. They're asking questions. Exercises have proven problematic, and unfortunately, some completely unprepared. If you really have not started...It is time! Call someone. Call me. Call a peer. Doesn't matter who, how or where, but if you have not been able to comply to this point, or are dramatically uncomfortable with where your organization is with emergency preparedness, start somewhere today.

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