



Executive Office of Health and Human Services
Department of Developmental Services

MEMORANDUM:	Guidance on Emergency Evacuation Safety Plan
FROM:	Office of Quality Management
DATE ISSUED:	September 30, 2024

Commonwealth of Massachusetts

I. Issue.

Department of Development Services (“DDS” or the “Department”) regulations do not address the steps that a provider agency should take when a scheduled fire drill fails to meet the evacuation time limit of 2 ½ minutes.¹ While DDS regulations provide guidance that a failed drill must be repeated, they do not provide specifics about what the appropriate window of time should be in which providers should complete a timely a fire drill.²

IV. Instructions to Repeat Fire Drills

DDS regulations generally require provider agencies to prepare and file with the area office a written safety plan assuring the safety of individuals in the event of a disaster, such as fire, explosion, loss of heat or electricity, interior flooding, or any other circumstances requiring emergency evacuation that must be regularly updated. An essential piece of each provider agency’s emergency evacuation safety plans (“EESP”) is the requirements that they include procedures for the “safe evacuation” of all individuals and residents.

When a fire drill at a provider agency is conducted and individuals do not evacuate within 2 ½ minutes from a residential site or in a timely manner from a work/day support, the provider should implement strategies, which are supported by documentation, to resolve the temporary new situation that has caused the evacuation to fail.³ It is each provider agency’s responsibility to notify the appropriate area office(s) of the issue and how the evacuation need will be addressed. The provider agency and area office(s) must agree on a documented timeframe for the repeat of a fire drill and retraining of individuals and staff.

¹ See 115 CMR 7.06 (3)(b)(6.). These regulations may be accessed, along with the rest, at <https://www.mass.gov/law-library/115-cmr>.

² See generally 115 CMR 7.06 (3).

³ DDS has published a handbook titled *Emergency Evacuation Safety Plan Guidelines* that remains a critical resource for provider agencies in developing and implementing EESPs. A copy of this document may be found at <https://www.mass.gov/lists/dds-emergency-evacuation-plan-and-forms>. This Guidance document is intended to clarify and reinforce the information in this resource.

Depending on the circumstances, the evacuation need should be addressed in one of the following ways:

- Informal Plan for Resolution – This action would be appropriate for a situation that has just developed, and the provider is determining whether it will be an ongoing issue. For example, one individual who has typically exited independently does not exit within 2 ½ minutes during an asleep drill. The provider would inform the area office of the situation and should communicate in a documented plan that another drill will be done within a specified period of time, ensuring thorough evaluation of the fire drill to determine if further intervention is needed.
- Addendum to Existing EESP – This action would be appropriate for a situation that is considered temporary in nature and requires a short-term response. For example, in the scenario outlined above, the provider may determine after doing another drill that the situation requires a more complicated intervention, such as a short-term teaching program so the individual understands the importance of exiting during practice drills. The provider would inform the area office(s) of the ongoing situation and submit an addendum to the existing EESP outlining the training program to be implemented and the length of time expected for resolution.
- Revised EESP – This action would be appropriate for a situation that requires a permanent revision to the safety plan. In the above example, the provider may find that the teaching program is not successful in ensuring that the individual again exits independently during asleep fire drills. To ensure safe evacuation at night, staff may need to physically prompt the individual to evacuate. Since this situation requires a permanent change in the supports provided for safe evacuation, the area office(s) should be notified and a revised EESP submitted for approval.