



## Shelter-in-Place Procedures for an Independent School District Pasadena, Texas

**Summary:** *With the possibility of chemical spills and explosions from nearby chemical plants, the Pasadena, Texas, Independent School District has implemented a comprehensive plan to keep children, faculty and staff safe when an evacuation may be too risky.*

With fifteen schools of the Pasadena Independent School District in close proximity to the chemical plants that line the Houston, Texas, ship channel, chemical leaks and explosions are a cause for developing a precautionary emergency plan in this community should one need to be implemented. Pasadena, TX area schools may be threatened by a chemical leak or explosion at least once during the year. Seeking to keep students safe – as well as teachers, faculty and staff – the school district has developed and implemented an aggressive shelter-in-place procedure.

Once local emergency officials notify the school's administration that shelter-in-place procedures should be initiated, the school becomes a veritable fortress. All students are brought indoors, the air circulation system is shut down, all exterior doors and windows are shut and locked, and the school is kept under tight security to ensure no one enters or leaves the building until further instructions are available.

As more information from emergency officials is disseminated, the District Crisis Communication Center advises the school on whether to keep sheltering-in-place or to allow the school to return to normal. Often the greatest challenge posed to the school administration during the procedure is not by unruly students, but rather the students' parents who attempt to retrieve their children from the secure environment. "We try to educate parents through letters, handbooks, and local media. It is important for them to know that the safest place for their children during this time is inside the school itself." To prevent concerned parents from endangering themselves and others while attempting to reach their children inside the school, school officials have instituted a "buffer room"- an area at the school entrance that is large enough to accommodate a number of parents, keeping them safe while ensuring the internal school environment remains secure.

### Thinking Locally:

How can you incorporate a shelter-in-place plan for your own jurisdiction?  
Does your shelter-in-place procedure include measures to prevent security breaches?

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