An emergency action plan (EAP) not only provides a template for action in the event of an emergency; it mentally prepares the athletic trainer or therapist in advance for efficient operation during a crisis or trauma. In 1998, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) published guidelines urging emergency plans specific to each institution (Halpin, 1999). Developing an EAP unique to your institution, facility, or school allows athletic trainers and therapists to consider many possible medical or weather emergency situations and prepare beforehand for action. It is the modern version of the mental exercise we were all taught as student athletic trainers and therapists, approaching the practice field on a daily basis: “Think of the worse-case scenario and plan in your mind how you will handle it.” A widely distributed written plan that is endorsed by administration and medical personnel is the best endeavor to prevent chaos and tragedy in athletics. It must be comprehensive enough to address any emergency yet specific to each venue. Finally, a good EAP should be practiced and rehearsed. This article discusses the issues involved in producing an EAP for your institution that can be disseminated to visiting schools and enhance efficiency should a medical emergency occur.

The purpose of an EAP is to have a written course of action in situations of medical stress or environmental danger. A well-written plan will provide a good protocol for unplanned events both at home and while traveling. An EAP involves education, is proactive, and necessitates interaction among several groups of people all working in their fields of expertise to lessen further damage. The sidebar on the next page provides an overview of the NCAA guideline regarding emergency action planning. This guideline crosses over different types of EAPs, which are discussed next.

Key Points

- Planning for an emergency in advance is crucial to the safe and expeditious care of an injured athlete.
- Include all critical personnel when forming a plan: athletic directors, operations, emergency departments, administration, and media.
- Maps detailed with locations of phones, access roads, and gates should accompany each plan.
- Your emergency action plan should be specific to your institution and each venue.
- Disseminate the plan and services available to all involved parties, including teams traveling to your institution.

Types of Emergency Action Plans

Emergency action plans can be divided into three different categories of information, each important and unique. One type is the standard protocol with which your entire staff should be familiar when an injury occurs. A written protocol should be in place detailing what to do, whom to contact, and a specific order to follow when there is an injury or illness warranting further medical attention. The protocol should detail at what point one should notify a physician (and the names and contact...
A second type of EAP provides instruction in the case of weather-related emergencies such as tornados or lightning. In this action plan, guidelines regarding suspending and resuming activities must be spelled out, along with a designated person in charge of activating the plan and safe shelters specific to each venue (Bennett, 1997). The NCAA also recommends a plan that addresses the guests or spectators at events in the case of lightning. Emergency plans regarding weather must be in writing, approved by the administration, widely disseminated, and practiced.

This article discusses the third type of EAP, which is an overall plan of action for emergency or trauma in athletics. This EAP is specific to an institution or school and each of its athletic venues. It governs practices, as well as scheduled contests.

**Developing an Emergency Action Plan**

When writing an EAP for your institution, input from administration is critical. Members of the academic administration (such as principals and athletic directors) must believe in the value of the plan and approve of it (Rankin & Ingersoll, 1995). If your school uses nonacademic areas such as city parks and community recreation departments or golf courses for athletic events (e.g., softball tournaments, cross-country races), the governing bodies of these areas must also be a part of the planning process. Finally, the local medical personnel who will ultimately respond to your call need to be aware of your intent to establish an EAP. Your team physician, the local emergency medical service (EMS) personnel, hospital emergency department, paramedics, and fire department can all contribute to a better, more efficient plan.

Nonadministrative personnel can provide valuable input to an effective EAP. A plan with administrative support means nothing if the coaches, game officials, or athletic trainers or therapists are not aware of it. It is crucial to also include the sports-information department because they can make announcements over the public-address system if necessary, and a plan can spell out when information is to be released from that department to the press. Game operations should play an integral role in the development of the plan, because that unit controls groundskeepers (who have access to gates and keys), security, and ushers.

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**Summary of the National Collegiate Athletic Association Guideline 1a**

Each scheduled practice or contest of an institution-sponsored intercollegiate athletics event, as well as out-of-season practices and skills sessions, should include the following:

- Presence of a person qualified to render emergency care.
- Presence of or planned access to a physician.
- Planned access to a medical facility.
- Means for transportation and communication between venue and medical facility.
- Access to working telephone or communication device.
- All necessary emergency equipment should be on site or quickly accessible.
- Personnel must be trained in advance to use equipment properly.
- Emergency information for each student-athlete must be on hand.
- A thorough understanding by all parties (including visitors) of the personnel and procedures associated with the emergency plan.
- Certification in CPR, first aid, and prevention of disease transmission should be required by all athletics personnel associated with practices, competition, skills instruction, and strength and conditioning.


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numbers for other physicians, should the primary one not be available), home instructions for the athlete, when to follow up, and who else to notify (head athletic trainer or therapist, coach, athletic director, or parents). This protocol should also require that current student-athlete information (medical history, allergies, current medication, and parent phone numbers) always be on hand, whether at home events or while traveling.