

LOCAL EMERGENCY PLANNING COMMITTEES (LEPC's)

History and Background

Local Emergency Planning Committees (LEPC's) in Idaho are a product of federal legislation passed after the disaster in Bhopal, India, where thousands of people died because of an accident involving hazardous chemicals. To prevent similar accidents in our communities, in 1986, Congress passed the Emergency Planning and Community Right-to-Know Act (EPCRA), also known as SARA Title III. EPCRA establishes requirements for businesses, and for federal, state and local governments regarding emergency planning and community right to know reporting for hazardous chemicals. This helped increase awareness about the presence of chemicals in their communities and releases of these chemicals into the environment. The State of Idaho also enacted the Hazardous Substance Emergency Response Act (Title 39, Chapter 71 Idaho Code) and the Idaho Homeland Security Act of 2006 (Idaho Code §46-1001 et.seq.). As a result, states and communities, working with industry are better able to protect public health and the environment. Congress enacted the EPCRA regulations to benefit communities.

LEPC Role

The role of LEPC's is to form a partnership with state, local and tribal government, responders, and industry as an enhancement for prevention, preparedness, response and recovery, planning, exercising and training. Local government is responsible for planning and response within their jurisdiction for all hazards. This includes ensuring the local hazard analysis adequately addresses any possible incidents that may occur in your jurisdiction; incorporating planning for those incidents in the local emergency operations plan; assessing capabilities and developing response capability using local resources, mutual aid and contractors; training responders; and exercising the plan.

LEPC's are crucial to local planning and community right-to-know programs. The membership comes from the local area and is familiar with factors that affect public safety, the environment, and the economy of the community. This expertise is essential as the LEPC is involved in the writing of the local emergency operations plan.

In addition to its formal duties, the LEPC can serve as a focal point in the community for information and discussion about emergency planning, training and exercising. Citizens may expect the LEPC to answer questions about all hazards and risk management actions.

Members of the LEPC represent the various organizations, agencies, departments, facilities and other groups within the jurisdiction. Each member must realize that they represent their organization on the LEPC and that they are responsible for coordinating information and activities from the LEPC to their organization, and for providing accurate feedback from their organization back to the LEPC. The LEPC has many responsibilities, mandates, and deadlines. The membership can organize to handle these various tasks by utilizing individual efforts, sub-committees, or contracted assistance.