

Sound Practice No. 5

Education a fundamental element for disaster prevention: Security and School Emergency Program in the Federal District

I. Background and Objectives

Prior to the 1985 earthquake, actions implemented to protect and guide the population for facing and coping with emergency situations in were not very clear and defined in Mexico City. After this event, the government and the institutions created for disaster recovery, and currently focused on disaster prevention, developed several policies, plans and programs for prevention and mitigation of future disaster. Education was recognized as a fundamental element for reaching these objectives.



The Ministry of Public Education designed and initiated the implementation of the Security and School Emergency Program (PSEE) in 1986. This program has as its main objective to consolidate the knowledge and aptitudes that will allow children and their families to develop a culture and an education for prevention in the Federal District. Consequently, this important group of the community will be prepared before risky situations or disasters take place. Elementary school is the most appropriate place to initiate children and families in these values and promote a culture of civil protection, as part of their standard formation as responsible members of the society.

Another objective of the program is to improve the physical condition of the schools and to define actions, strategies and plans to help people to be prepared before, during and after a disaster happens. These actions are oriented to guarantee "the safety of the inhabitants and the preservation of the social, physical, psychological integrity of the students". To reach these objectives, the Ministry of the Public Education established the Scholar and Social Participation Council for Civil Protection and School Emergency (General Education Law). In this context, the main axis of education policies for disaster prevention is to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity of the educational community in the Federal District.

II. Actions established in the Security and School Emergency Program in the Federal District

Among the most important actions established and implemented by the Security and School Emergency Programs in the Federal District for disaster prevention are the following:



1) Carry out mock drills at the schools, at least three times during the school year

2) Develop a culture of prevention and civil protection among the children through the incorporation of actions, strategies and concepts in the study plans; and therefore, in the books and regular classes, in both public and private schools (Civil Protection Law of the Federal District)

3) Set up School Security Committees within the school structure for elementary and high schools. These committees should be constituted by directives, educational and administrative personnel, as well as, students (for the high schools), parents and members of the community. Members of the committee are requested to participate in the design, implementation and evaluation of alarm systems, security actions and strategies, and in the realization of mockeries and evacuation exercises.

These committees are integrated by four brigades:

- a. Security Brigade
- b. First Aids Brigade
- c. Communication Brigade
- d. Search and Rescue Brigade

Every school is required to organize such committees which will promote team work, solidarity and community participation in schools. They also promote daily preventive actions among the students and their families.

4) Incorporate notions and concepts related to ecology, civil protection, environmental protection and health protection, through the study plans, books and lectures in both the public and private schools.



5) Keep in stock first aid and security appliances for all levels of education. In this context, the Ministry of Public Education, in order to guarantee the structural security of the educational facilities, established that all schools need to have extinguishers, first-aid kits, alarm systems, smoke detecting system, seismic alert and sirens.

6) Train teachers and students on first aid and evacuation actions. This training should be provided by government organizations and institutions.



7) Distribute pamphlets, posters, videos, radio and television messages relating to what to do before, during and after an emergency situation.

III. Results of the Security and School Emergency Program in the Federal District

Some of the most important accomplishments of the program can be summarized as follows:

A. Elementary Education

To strengthen civil protection values in the elementary school, the General Direction of Civil Protection in the Federal District and the Ministry of Public Education have promoted that schools distribute information related to the natural hazards that can represent a risk for the population, relating them to the actions and strategies that people can follow for facing and coping with emergency situations.



In this context, public textbooks incorporate notions, strategies and actions for preventing and mitigating disasters in the following way:

a. In the first grade of elementary school, public textbooks introduce to the students in the concepts of rights and duties, including the right of protection and having a safe life. Besides this, some concepts of civil protection are included.

b. Public textbooks for second graders introduce the topic of the Security in the School, and all schools should integrate a Security Committee that have to follow the rules establish in the Security Regulation of the school. In this school year, students are taught the meaning and usefulness of simulacrum; however they participate in earthquake simulacrum since kinder-garden.

During this school year, students are requested to identify and make an inventory of vulnerable areas inside their homes and they participate in several activities related to accidents prevention in their neighborhoods.



c. On third grade, in the Natural Science class, students are taught about physical phenomena, their characteristics and consequences, actions for risks prevention, first aids and actions for accidents prevention. In their textbooks and in the study program are included information related to the disaster prevention and mitigation in the Federal District, as well as, some recommendations during earthquakes.

d. Natural Science class in fourth grade includes topics related to the causes and consequences of natural hazards as earthquakes, volcanoes, hurricanes, floods and droughts, with more detail than in the previous academic year. They are also given some recommendations about the actions they should follow in case of accidents in their homes.

e. During fifth grade, the Natural Sciences class introduces concepts related to the mountainous system and seismic movements. Students are introduced into basic concepts of Tectonic Plate Theory, and with more detail than in the previous year, they receive instructions about what to do during an earthquake and fire, considering the technical information given in their textbooks and lessons.

f. Sixth year will reinforce concepts learnt in the previous years and also review topics related to natural disasters and the nature cycles, environmental problems and the security brigades.

Finally, in their textbooks and lectures, students are given elements to enhance their vision within a culture of prevention and the functions and obligations that the National Civil Protection System (Sinaproc) has for assure inhabitants' security through the development of plans and programs for disaster prevention and mitigation.

Although the study programs, textbooks and lessons in the elementary school include all those topics related to natural hazards and actions recommended before, during and after an emergency situation, this information is not systematized and it has little focus on civil protection and actions for disaster prevention and mitigation. Also, it is necessary that topics related to actions for facing floods and volcanic eruptions be included. These of course do not diminish the important and sustained efforts that the national government and the Federal District are putting together to build and consolidate a safer community.

It is important to mention that all the schools have an obligation to periodically conduct some seismic simulacrum, so the students know how to react in such a situation. Generally, in any emergency situation it is expected that students apply the knowledge they have acquired in the school and they react in more opportune and effective way, based on the Security and Scholar Emergency Program (PSEE) in the Federal District.

B. Other results of the Security and Scholar Emergency Program (PSEE) implementation in the schools located in the Federal District



1. Approximately, 25 schools of the Federal District have put in place seismic alerts, which signals come from the coasts of Guerrero. These schools are located in the areas most exposed to seismic risk in this entity.

2. Since 1994, the Committee of School Maintenance, which presides the School Emergency Direction, is focused on the development and implementation of actions and strategies related to the preventive maintenance of the schools facilities; therefore, approximately 8,200 schools receive systematically maintenance to reduce the impact of possible earthquakes before any kind of emergency situation happens.

3. Security School Subcommittees have been constituted in the 16 political delegations. These subcommittees have monthly reunions, where they establish the objectives and goals for disaster prevention and mitigation that will be pursued inside all schools around the Federal District. They also evaluate the actions implemented in all schools for creating a culture of prevention among the children.

These subcommittees are guided by officials who belong to the School Security Direction, of the Ministry of Public Security, or to the delegations, or the schools. Parents and some members of the protection units of each neighborhood can also integrate these subcommittees:

4. The Ministry of Public Education constituted the Civil Protection Social Direction which is in charge of linking the schools with the General Direction of Civil Protection in the Federal District and with this Ministry. The main actions done by this Direction are following:

- a. It promotes the culture of protection not just inside the classrooms, also in the students' homes, through the design and implementation of the family plans of civil protection.
- b. It defines and implements actions related to the rescue and medical urgencies when a disaster happens.
- c. It supervises the structural security in all the schools of the Federal District.
- d. It develops new technologies for disaster prevention and mitigation applied to schools.



5. Finally, the implementation of this program in all schools located in the Federal District has improved the physical and psychological condition of the children to respond before, during and after an emergency, since they are prepared to act in an opportune and appropriate way.

IV. Limitations of the Security and Scholar Emergency Program

It is important to mention that although the Security and School Emergency Program in the Federal District has carried out considerable efforts to promote education and a culture of prevention, there are some issues that require to be solved:

a. The first one is related to the insufficient covering and unequal distribution of education opportunities among the socio-economic groups. This situation has caused that children who belong to low income families, which usually live in risky areas, do not receive the necessary information to develop basic notions of self-protection.

b. The second one is related to the inadequacy of human, material and financial resources in the education sector that can be allocated to civil protection actions and strategy definition.



c. The third one relates to the lack of coordination, supervision, and evaluation of the prevention activities implemented in the schools.

V. References

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Knowledge Base Coding Reference:

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