



GUIDANCE ON REQUIRED EMERGENCY DRILLS

Revised July 1, 2025

INTRODUCTION

Fire, lockdown, tornado, cardiac response, and bus evacuation drills are legislatively mandated in Virginia's public schools by the *Code of Virginia*, Virginia Administrative Code Standards of Accreditation (SOA), and/or the Virginia State Fire Prevention Code. Several other drills are recommended by the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) Virginia Center for School and Campus Safety (VCSCS) and the I Love U Guys® Foundation (ILUG). Beginning in 2021, Virginia began a voluntary statewide adoption of the Standard Response Protocol (SRP) and Standard Reunification Method (SRM) through ILUG. This document includes details of the requirements and recommendations for reference.

FIRE (EVACUATION) DRILLS

Evacuate is one of the five SRP actions. "Evacuate" may be followed by a location and is used to move people from one location to a different location in or out of the building.

To comply with the *Code of Virginia*, the Standards of Accreditation (SOA), and the Virginia Statewide Fire Prevention Code (SFPC), every public school must conduct:

- One fire drill within the first 10 school days,
- A second fire drill at any time within the first 20 school days, and
- One fire drill every month thereafter for the remainder of the school term.

Relevant Code:

- The *Code of Virginia* [§ 22.1-137](#). Fire Drills.
- SOA [8VAC20-132-240](#). School facilities and safety.
- Virginia Statewide Fire Prevention Code (SFPC) [Chapter 4 Section 403](#).

LOCK-DOWN DRILLS

Lock-down is also an SRP action. "Lock-down" is followed by "Locks, Lights, Out of Sight" and is the protocol used to secure individual rooms and keep occupants quiet and in place.

To comply with the *Code of Virginia* and the SOA, every public school must:

- Conduct at least two (2) lock-down drills during the first 20 days of school (Refer to section B of the *Code of Virginia* [§ 22.1-137.2](#) regarding Pre-K and Kindergarten) and at least two additional lock-down drills after the first 60 days of school.
- "Provide the parents of enrolled students with at least 24 hours' notice before the school conducts any lock-down drill. Nothing in this section shall be construed to require such notice to include the exact date and time of the lock-down drill."

Relevant Code:

- The *Code of Virginia* [§ 22.1-137.2](#). Lock-down drills.
- SOA [8VAC20-132-240](#). School facilities and safety.

TORNADO DRILLS

To comply with the *Code of Virginia*, every public school must conduct:

- At least one (1) tornado drill per school year. This drill is usually conducted in March to align with Virginia's Severe Weather Week (VDEM).

Relevant Code:

- The *Code of Virginia* [§ 22.1-137.1](#). Tornado drills.

CARDIAC RESPONSE DRILLS

To comply with the *Code of Virginia*, every public elementary or secondary school is required to *develop and implement a cardiac emergency response plan (CERP) or an athletic emergency action plan (EAP) that addresses the appropriate use of school personnel to respond to incidents involving an individual who is experiencing sudden cardiac arrest or a similar life-threatening emergency (i) while on school grounds and (ii) if such school has an athletic department or organized athletic program, while attending or participating in an athletic practice or event sponsored by such school or conducted by such school's athletic department or organized athletic program.* Every school must:

- Conduct at least one (1) cardiac response drill per year.

Relevant Code:

- The *Code of Virginia* [§ 22.1-271.9](#)

BUS EMERGENCY DRILLS

To comply with the *Code of Virginia* and the SOA, every public school must conduct:

- A bus evacuation drill at least once during the first 30 days of school, and
- A second bus evacuation drill at least once during the first 30 days of the second semester.
“At the Pre-K-1 grade levels, initial safety training shall occur during the first week of school, with additional training periodically during the year.”
“A copy of bus rider safety rules shall be sent to parents at the beginning of the school year. The information shall include a request that parents or their designee accompany their young children to and from the bus stop.”

Relevant Code:

- The *Code of Virginia* [§ 22.1-184](#). School bus emergency drills.
- SOA [8VAC20-07-110](#). Pupil transportation safety instruction.

OTHER DRILLS

In accordance with recommendations by DCJS and [the I Love U Guys® Foundation](#), the following drills are also recommended at least once per school year:

- **EARTHQUAKE DRILL:** The Great ShakeOut, [Great ShakeOut Earthquake Drills](#);
- **REVERSE EVACUATION DRILL:** A drill conducted when students are outside and need to quickly return to the classroom;
- **HOLD DRILL:** “Hold” is an SRP action followed by the directive “In Your Room or Area” and is the protocol used when hallways need to be kept clear of occupants;
- **SECURE DRILL:** “Secure” is an SRP action followed by the directive “Get Inside. Lock Outside Doors” and is the protocol used to safeguard people within the building; and
- **SHELTER DRILL:** “Shelter” is an SRP action. State the Hazard and Safety Strategy for the protection of the group and self.

CONTACTS

For more information on this guidance, please contact:

Shellie Evers: email at Shellie.Evers@dcjs.virginia.gov or telephone at (804) 629-7042; or

James Christian: email at James.Christian@dcjs.virginia.gov or telephone (804) 357-0967.