

Shelter Assessment Tool Training Script

Emergencies and disasters stress our ability to meet basic community needs, such as the need for food and water when supplies are disrupted or unsafe, or the need for shelter when homes have been damaged.

When an emergency response includes providing safe and adequate shelter for people affected by the emergency, the incident command system often turns to environmental public health practitioners to assess conditions at shelters.

To assist environmental public health practitioners in assessing shelters, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has collaborated with health professionals from state and local environmental health programs and the American Red Cross to develop a tool to guide practitioners through a shelter assessment. This recording will give you an overview of the shelter assessment tool and how to use it.

One of the main uses of the tool is to help you identify priority health and safety issues. Information in this tool is designed to supplement existing assessment tools, plans, procedures, and guidelines. The tool will enable you to provide shelter managers with an assessment of the environmental conditions at each shelter and recommendations for improving conditions, if needed. It also captures data and documents common shelter issues so this information can be used in future planning and shelter improvement.

CDC encourages users to share their findings with shelter managers and local emergency management agencies to keep them informed of needs that exist in shelters and prompt them to correct problems.

Let's take a look at the assessment tool. It's a standardized instrument with two basic parts: the environmental health assessment form for shelters, and an instruction sheet to guide you through the assessment process.

The form is divided into 14 sections. Each one addresses a different aspect of shelter health and safety. The instruction sheet is numbered to correspond with the assessment form. Each numbered instruction describes the section in detail, explains the intent, and provides standards and/or criteria for answering the questions on the form.

We will briefly review each section. Then we will give you more detail about the information in each section.

- Section 1 is for recording agency data. It also includes an area to flag if the environmental health assessor identifies immediate needs in the shelter.
- Section 2 records the facility name, facility type, and counts of the shelter residents.
- Section 3 evaluates the physical aspects of the facility.
- Section 4 evaluates the food supply.
- Section 5 evaluates the availability of safe drinking water and ice.
- Section 6 covers the shelter's health and medical requirements.

- Section 7 is about sanitation.
- Section 8 deals with solid waste.
- Section 9 covers childcare.
- Section 10 assesses the adequacy of the sleeping areas.
- Section 11 identifies shelter facilities and services for companion animals.
- Section 12 covers questions that do not fall into the previous categories.
- Section 13 is for general comments about needs and problems identified in the shelter, and
- Section 14 is an “immediate needs” sheet.

Now we’re going to return to Section 1 and review the information this assessment tool can provide, to give you a better idea of how it can be used effectively.

In Section 1, capture data about the organization managing the shelter, information about who is completing the assessment, and that person’s contact information, in case follow-up is needed. Section 1 contains a shaded box labeled “immediate needs identified.” However, this box should only be filled in after the entire assessment has been completed. It will alert reviewers to the fact that immediate needs exist and should be addressed.

In Section 2, record the type of shelter, for example, whether it is a community shelter or a special needs shelter; whether the American Red Cross is operating the shelter; and where the shelter is located. If known,

include the longitude and latitude, street address, city, and county. Also include contact information for the persons managing the shelter, and note the census of the shelter at the time of the visit.

Section 3 captures information about the facility and its condition. Include information related to security, the building structure, ventilation, cleanliness, and hazards, as well as type of power, water and other utilities.

In Section 4, record information about the safe supply of food and about facilities for food preparation, and document safe food handling practices and whether temperature-controlled food storage facilities exist. In this section you, will also assess the presence of adequate dishwashing facilities and the general cleanliness of the kitchen area.

In Section 5 you will capture information about the adequacy of the water and ice supply, and whether the water and ice come from a safe source. Document how shelter managers will ensure that water and ice meet state, local, and federal safe drinking water standards.

Section 6 is the health and medical section. This is where you record the types of medical care services available at the shelter. Are counseling services provided? Use this section to document any reports of unusual illnesses or injuries.

Section 7 covers sanitation issues. Do you have enough functioning toilets, hand-washing stations, showers, and laundry facilities for the shelter population? Do you have a large enough supply of soap, towels, and other

toilet supplies? Are the facilities maintained and cleaned regularly? What type of wastewater system does the facility use? Is it operational, and if so, is it maintained?

In Section 8 you will address solid waste issues, including the supply of waste receptacles and the proper methods of disposal. Consider whether the facility has appropriate storage facilities of adequate size and whether solid waste is being removed in a timely manner.

In Section 9 you must assess the child care area. Among the basic facilities needed are a clean diaper-changing area, a place for workers to wash their hands, a place for children to wash their hands, and an adequate process for cleaning toys and play areas. Are the toys provided safe? Are they age-appropriate for the children in the area? Is the child care area clean, and will it be cleaned regularly?

Use Section 10 to assess the shelter's sleeping area. Is the number of cots and beds or mats provided adequate for the number of individuals staying at the shelter? Are the sleeping areas being cleaned and maintained? Does each shelter resident have an adequate amount of space? Is the space between the cots and beds large enough for people to move freely in and out without crowding? Is the supply of bedding adequate for the number of residents? Is it clean?

Section 11 allows you to assess the shelter's companion animals' area, if it has one. If care and companion animals, such as seeing-eye dogs, are

housed within the facilities, are designated areas provided for residents and their animals? Are the areas regularly cleaned and maintained?

Section 12 covers two unrelated but important topics. This is where you report whether the shelter facility is accessible to disabled residents and whether it conforms to legal standards of accessibility. You also record the presence or absence of designated smoking areas outside the shelter.

Section 13 collects all the comments related to items identified in previous sections. When you identify an item that calls for a comment, turn to Section 13 and write the section number along with the notes that detail what you found. For example, Item 60 asks whether the number of operational hand washing stations is adequate. If your answer is, “No,” you can record #60 and your comment: “More hand washing stations are needed in the restroom area of the shelter.”

The last section, Section 14, records items from other sections that require immediate action because they raise serious public health issues. For example, if the water provided to the facility does not meet safe drinking water standards; that would warrant immediate action. Or if toilets are overflowing, and people are forced to walk through sewage on the ground, the issue would certainly need to be addressed quickly. Recording that observation in Section 14 alerts emergency managers receiving the form to issues requiring urgent attention.

When you complete your assessment, return to Section 1, and check the appropriate answer in the “Immediate Needs” box to flag the shelter if it needs urgent assistance.

Environmental and public health officials play a vital role in protecting the health and safety of individuals at shelters. We must work together with partners; volunteers; key agencies, such as the American Red Cross; and other organizations to meet the needs of communities and care for those who are most vulnerable after an event. A critical component of that care is meeting appropriate health and safety standards.

Used in conjunction with other planning and preparedness measures, this shelter assessment tool can help you ensure that shelters are safe for everyone.

We’re pleased to join you in protecting the health and safety of your community after an emergency.