

ROLES OF EMERGENCY RESPONSE TEAM IN EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION FOR EPRP

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Abstract. The Emergency Response Team (ERT) in emergency management in higher education institutions (HEIs) is an important element in the Emergency Preparedness and Response Plan (EPRP). As a key organizational recommendation, the ERT should prioritize its role in effectively managing emergencies that are within its operational capacity. This research study presents ERT as an important management system in EPRP through the assessment of ERTs active participation in emergencies conducted through the analysis of its establishment, procedures and documentation in the organization. This research study uses a content articles analysis review of relevant literature to assess the functions and capabilities of ERT in the context of emergency management. Furthermore, a content analysis critically examines the literature reviewed in the article. The paper also highlights the important functions and capabilities of the emergency response team in addressing campus emergencies, ensuring environmental safety, and fostering resilience through the roles and responsibilities of the ERT.

Keywords: *Emergency Response Team (ERT), Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), Emergency Management (EM), Environmental Safety (ES)*

Introduction

The National Security Council (NSC) of Malaysia meeting chaired by the Prime Minister on 1 August 2024 agreed to cancel NSC Directive No. 20 and replace it with a new directive known as NADMA Directive No. 1: National Disaster Management Policy and Mechanism in light of the worsening disaster scenario, human activities and the emergence of threats. NADMA Directive No. 1 aims to outline policies and mechanisms for comprehensive disaster management and disaster risk reduction, covering the pre-, during and post-disaster stages, including land-based disaster risk reduction. The main focus of disaster management is comprehensive and continuous disaster risk reduction through prevention, mitigation, preparedness and response plan recovery programs. This directive serves as a guide for all parties to manage disasters more efficiently and effectively. This directive also applies to institutions of higher learning in preparing for disasters and emergencies on campus. Higher education institutions must provide campus communities with a safe and nurturing environment to help with academic and social development. For increased emphasis on safety, higher education institutions must understand their community's perceptions toward emergency preparedness and response (Coveleski, 2014). According to Ab Aziz et al. (2019) the establishment of an emergency response team in Malaysia has been stated in the Occupational Safety and Health Act 1994, in Section 15(2)(c). The quote in the section mentions that as an employer, the information, instruction, training and supervision regarding the safety and health at the workplace should be provided to the employee.

The requirement of ERT as the first responder to provide a standard operating procedure (SOP) when assisting in evacuation and performing search and rescue in an emergency.

Literature review

Higher Education Institutions

Higher education institutions (HEIs) play a crucial role in emergency management and acknowledged as key partners in emergency preparedness by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) during emergencies (Dunn, 2018). Enhancing preparedness, response, and recovery efforts on campus can significantly bolster the resilience of the entire HEI jurisdiction during an emergency crisis. Many stakeholders often lack awareness of the impacts of emergencies on the campus communities (Patel et al., 2023). Issues such as suspension of campus activities, disruption of classes, and damage to buildings and facilities are among the challenges that arise during such emergencies. These challenges can be better understood through the function and capability of the emergency response team within the emergency preparedness and response plan framework. According to statistics (MOHE, 2023) the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia in 2023, Malaysia has more than 590 higher learning institutions under the higher learning institutions. Higher education institutions consist of 20 public university, 36 polytechnics, 104 community colleges and 434 private university with a total student enrolment in 2023 of 1,247,908 students, as stated in *Table 1*. Several emergencies happened in higher education institution such as fire incidents reported in newspapers (Yusof et al., 2021). Hostel in Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM), ninety percent 90% damages in fire accident in July 2021. The other emergencies of fire incident happened at Faculty of Economics and Administration (FEP), University of Malaya (UM) In August 2019. An effective emergency preparedness and response plan requires a comprehensive and coordinated communication approach by employer and community groups, including government agencies, emergency services, non-governmental organizations and higher education institutions (Renschler et al., 2016; Coveleski, 2014; Ford and Schmidt, 2000). Therefore, emergency preparedness and response plan (EPRP) involve emergency response team identifying potential emergencies, developing contingency plans, training staff, and conducting drills and exercises to test the effectiveness of plans and procedures (Renschler et al., 2016).

Table 1. Total number of student enrolments in HEIs in year 2023.

No	Category	Frequency
1	Public University	593,101
2	Polytechnics	79,504
3	Community Colleges	16,611
4	Private University	558,692
Total		1,247,908

Emergency management

Emergency management represents a challenging field both professionally and personally (Phillips et al., 2016). Despite the many obstacles and barriers to ensuring public safety, the field of emergency management has grown dramatically over the past fifty years. A variety of events, including floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, tsunamis,

earthquakes, volcanoes, major explosions, large hazardous waste sites, and terrorist attacks, have all highlighted the importance of understanding how people and organizations behave when faced with disasters. They state, since 1979, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has responsible for federal agency coordinating emergency and disaster activities in the United States. FEMA was established to unify and improve the effectiveness of emergency management in response to emergencies and disasters. In Malaysia, National Disaster Management Agency (NADMA) has performed on 1st October 2015 under Prime Ministers Department to consolidate the national emergency and disaster. The establishment of NADMA is taking over the responsibility handling on emergency and disaster from the National Security Council. NADMA Directive No. 1 aims to outline the Policy and Mechanism for Disaster Management and Disaster Risk Reduction, comprehensively covering the stages before, during, and after a disaster, including disaster risk reduction on land (NADMA NO.1, 2024). This directive, effective from 1 August 2024, provides a detailed mechanism for disaster management and risk reduction. It applies to all government agencies, statutory bodies, private entities, voluntary organizations, and individuals, including institutions of higher learning.

The National Security Council, in Directive 20, defines an emergency as an incident, whether natural or human-induced, that occurs suddenly and causes injury, death, damage to property or the environment, and disrupts daily life activities (KPT, 2012). Tipler (2017) describe emergency as an unexpected event or sudden situation requiring immediate action. Further, Alteneiji (2015) elaborates a global emergency as an event or incident that a country can manage using its resources and organizations, within a scale that the country can handle. Emergency management encompasses the actions that organizations undertake in response to unexpected events that adversely impact people, the environment, and the organizations operations (Ughulu and Igabor, 2021). It serves as the managerial function that establishes a framework for communities to reduce vulnerability to hazards and effectively cope with disasters (Seeger et al., 2021). Most article, journal authors, agree that emergency management principles revolve around four distinct phases that is, preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation (Adams et al., 2022; Al Mujaidel, 2022; Seeger et al., 2021; Ughulu and Igabor, 2021; Tipler, 2017; Alteneiji, 2015).

Four phase cycle

Accordingly, four phases of emergency management work together to minimize the impact of an emergency on people, property and infrastructure and ensure that affected communities can recover and return to normal as quickly as possible. The fundamental principles four phases adopted to measures the emergencies and the effects of emergency readiness (Ughulu and Igabor, 2021). These measures help victim and rescuer reduce the effect at the affected area. The summaries of the four phase cycles as per stated: (1) Preparedness: This phase of emergency management involves the development of contingency plans that agencies activate when an emergency or disaster occurs. It extends beyond immediate response efforts to mitigate the impact of potential emergencies. Preparedness encompasses continuous planning, organization, training, and resource allocation to enhance the capacity to respond effectively to various hazards, incidents, and emergencies. It is a proactive rather than reactive approach. These efforts include activities such as emergency drills and information dissemination, ensuring a continuous cycle of preparedness activities. (2) Response: This is the stage

where the prepared plan is activated. In the context of emergency management, the response phase refers to the immediate actions taken following the issuance of an emergency warning or alarm. During this critical period, the primary objectives are to save lives, minimize losses, and protect affected individuals. These actions include the coordination of resources, activation of emergency operations centers, evacuation procedures for at-risk populations, and the provision of essential services such as medical care and shelter. A well-rehearsed emergency plan developed as part of the preparedness phase allows for efficient coordination of rescue efforts and effective implementation of the response plan.

(3) Recovery: This phase begins once the acute emergency has subsided. Efforts during this stage are focused on restoring critical functions and mitigating long-term damage. Following an effective response, agencies engage in recovery operations to address the aftermath of the emergency. These operations include clearing debris, conducting search and rescue missions, and providing general assistance to those affected. During this phase, psychologists, counsellors, and religious leaders are essential for offering support and consultation to those impacted by the emergency. The primary objective is to restore victims to their previous state. Key activities include debris clearance, providing financial assistance, repairing infrastructure, and maintaining evacuation support until normal conditions are fully reinstated. (4) Mitigation: The final stage of emergency management focuses on proactive strategies designed to lessen the effects of disasters and reduce the risk of loss to life and property. These strategies include enforcing building codes, establishing zoning regulations, and developing defensible spaces in high-risk areas. Additionally, this phase involves assessing earlier stages, pinpointing weaknesses, and enhancing contingency plans to improve overall preparedness and resilience. By incorporating feedback from these assessments, mitigation serves as a critical link between preparedness and future emergency response strategies, thus completing the four phases of the emergency preparedness and response plan cycle.

Emergency preparedness and response plan

Over the past decade, various disasters and emergencies, whether natural or man-made, have occurred, affecting property, the environment and human life. The impact of these incidents has prompted various stakeholders to study and evaluate management measures and revise policies. The consequences of such emergencies can result in death or injury (Renschler et al., 2016). To ensure an effective response, an emergency preparedness and response plan (EPRP) are essential for immediate action during an emergency, according to the established plan and guidelines (Ab Aziz et al., 2019). EPRP provides a systematic approach that organizations and management can use when facing an emergency (Turner, 2020). The higher education sector is no exception to this challenge because EPRP is an essential system for early action in emergencies, which affect the safety of life, health, property and the environment. It is also a comprehensive framework designed to guide organizations in preparing for, responding to, and recovering from emergencies effectively. ERP functions as a structured framework designed to guide actions during emergencies on campus. The higher education sector is not immune to emergencies and must be prepared to implement the EPRP as a primary measure to protect life, health, and minimize damage to property and the environment during incidents (Turner, 2020). The EPRP aims to safeguard life and property by efficiently utilizing available campus resources. Higher education institutions must be

ready to implement the EPRP through emergency response teams (ERT) to ensure the protection of life, health, and the minimization of property and environmental damage during emergencies.

The United States Department of Homeland Security describes emergency preparedness as an ongoing process that involves multiple phases: planning (developing strategies and action plans), organizing (allocating resources and defining roles), training (ensuring personnel are prepared), equipping (providing essential tools and materials), exercising (simulating response scenarios), evaluating (measuring effectiveness), and implementing corrective actions (enhancing coordination during incident response) (Kapucu and Khosa, 2013). EPRP is regarded as a specialized system and process aimed at preparing responders and ensuring efficient organizational performance during emergencies, with a strong focus on readiness and operational effectiveness (Kapucu, 2008). Additionally, EPRP is defined as a structured program, system, and documented plan critical for minimizing adverse impacts, particularly in disaster-prone regions affected by events like wildfires, power outages, earthquakes, and floods (Caymaz et al., 2013).

The emergency preparedness and response plan aims to establish a systematic approach for the swift identification, notification, readiness, recovery, and deployment of key personnel, building owners, occupants, and stakeholders in affected areas (Kawasaki et al., 2020). It also integrates organizational values with Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) policies, regulations, and standard operating procedures (Adamzadeh et al., 2014). Serving as a comprehensive emergency management guide, the EPRP outlines procedures and strategies to effectively address various emergencies, offering general guidance to identify, prevent, mitigate, and manage risks, injuries, and accidents impacting workers and communities. By fostering employer commitment to harm prevention, the EPRP provides a framework for minimizing and responding to potential threats, prioritizing the safety and well-being of employees and the broader community (Albris et al., 2020; Kapucu, 2008). Designed as a dynamic document, the EPRP undergoes regular review and updates typically on an annual basis to ensure it remains relevant and effective in addressing evolving risks (Rañeses et al., 2018; Paton and Johnston, 2001).

Emergency response team

An Emergency Response Team (ERT) is an internal group within an organization designated to manage emergency actions. ERT defined by Sharif (2019) as a team of qualified and authorized personnel trained to provide immediate assistance, ensuring occupant safety during emergencies. As first responders, ERTs can swiftly address emergencies, often being the nearest responders at the scene. These teams are equipped to handle firefighting, first aid, and various other emergency situations within the organization. Accordingly, ERT is a specialized team responsible for ensuring proper evacuation, shutting down building services, collaborating with civil authorities, protecting property, and conducting safety evaluations before re-entry. In Malaysia, several regulations aim to ensure the safety, health, and welfare of workers and the general public during emergencies. Local government agencies, such as the Fire Department, have established measures to ensure safety during emergencies, including guidelines and training for ERTs to enhance their skills and knowledge. The importance of ERTs in ensuring individual safety during crises is undeniable. One of the roles of ERT committees is to design and develop emergency action management systems to

facilitate efficient responses during emergencies. These committees also conduct related programs, such as training sessions. Emergency management includes early preparation, impact mitigation, response to potential conditions or events, and post-emergency recovery. The ERT's responsibility is to effectively implement security protocols during emergencies. According to the Malaysian Standard MS 2735:2021, ERT is a tactical unit that performs on-site emergency response operations under a designated leader. The ERT focuses on preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation, covering essential phases of emergency management. ERT also as a guide for management in implementing security measures to enhance safety during emergencies (Al Mujaidel, 2022).

In alignment with the objectives of the Occupational Safety and Health Act 1994, which aims to protect employees' safety, health, and welfare from workplace hazards and risks, the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) has established the IIUM Emergency Response Team. This initiative is designed to enhance safety regulations and comply with legal frameworks, including the National Security Council (NSC) Directive No. 20 on the Policy and Mechanism of Disaster Management and the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) 1994. The Office of Occupational Safety, Health, and Built Environment (OSHBE) at IIUM emphasizes that the ERTs objectives include training and preparedness for emergency situations, ensuring the prompt resumption of normal operations, meeting legal requirements, and minimizing personal injury, property damage, and environmental harm. The legal requirement for establishment an ERT in University is to fulfil the legal requirement regarding the emergency as of *Table 2*.

Table 2. Legal requirement toward ERT.

No	Legal requirements	Section number	Relation to ERT
1	Occupational Safety and Health Act 1994 (OSHA 1994)	Section 15	ERT must ensure that the University is in compliance with OSHA 1994 regulations, especially in terms of emergency preparedness and response.
2	Factories and Machinery Act 1967 (FMA 1967)	Section 17	ERT must ensure that the University is in compliance with FMA 1967 regulations, especially in terms of safety procedures and emergency response for any machinery or equipment on campus.
3	Civil Defense Act 1951 (CDA 1951)	Section 5	ERT must ensure that the University is in compliance with CDA 1951 regulations, especially in terms of emergency response plans and procedures for natural disasters or other civil defense emergencies.

Materials and Methods

The methodology for this study involved synthesizing information from various sources, including conference proceedings, journal articles, reports, guidelines, and procedural standards related to emergency management in higher education institutions. A total of 38 papers were reviewed, all of which met or aligned with the study selection criteria. These papers were analysed to synthesize discussions on the roles and responsibilities of Emergency Response Teams (ERTs). This study used analytical and content analysis methods to assess the functions and capabilities of ERTs within the framework of university campus sustainability. As a key organizational recommendation, ERTs should prioritize their role in effectively managing emergencies within their capacity. The assessment of ERTs active involvement in emergency management focused on their establishment within the organization, adherence to procedures, and documentation practices.

Results and Discussion

The Emergency Response Team (ERT) as an in-house squad to deal with emergency situation in emergency management for the campus environment at the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). This ERT is the first responder special team handling the emergencies appointed by the University authority. The task undertaken by ERT members as early respond while waiting for the assistance from the relevant authority. The roles and responsibilities of the ERT in managing emergencies have discusses and provided in the IIUM HSE Manual and Procedures. Here is a detailed summarising of the roles and responsibilities of the ERT. *Incident Commander*: Responsible for forming the Emergency Response Team (ERT) and establishing emergency preparedness programs and training. They review and revise emergency response plans and procedures, execute these plans, and communicate them to all relevant personnel. During an emergency, the Incident Commander coordinates with the Evacuation Team Leader, controls the situation, reports to BOMBA, notifies top management, and conducts post-event meetings with relevant agencies. *Deputy Incident Commander*: Assist the Incident Commander during evacuations and emergencies, ensures building safety before re-entry, and takes charge in the absence of the Incident Commander. They also provide data and information to related parties such as the Police and Fire Rescue Department. *Historian*: The function is to document all details of the emergency situation, stay with the Incident Commander in the emergency operating room, and remain alert to receive commands.

Secretary: To initiate meeting on emergency issues, assist in communicating emergency response plan, help establish preparedness program, and review the ERT member list and emergency response plan accordingly. *Evacuation Team Leader*: Person that is familiar with the building evacuation plan and basic emergency procedures, knows the alert signals, and identified evacuation routes. Call for help from Fire and Rescue Department, Police, and hospital, to ensure occupants do not re-enter the venue, maintain control until relieved by authority, and report to the Incident Commander. *Evacuation Team Assistant*: To support the Evacuation Team Leader and take charge in their absence. *Floor/Office/Classroom/Lab Marshalls*: To assist the Evacuation Team Leader, communicate evacuation requirements, check assigned areas, and provide updated occupant list at the assembly area. *Fire Fighting Team Leader* investigates and extinguishes fires, controls the emergency fire area until the Fire Department arrives, ensures the area is safe, and maintains communication with the Evacuation Team Leader. They also person to ensure firefighting equipment is in good condition and hand over tasks to BOMBA upon their arrival. *Fire Fighting Team Assistant*: To supports the Fire Fighting Team Leader and take charge in their absence. *Search and Rescue Team Leader*: Responsible for searching and rescuing victims during an incident, receiving task from the Incident Commander, coordinating team activities, and handing over task to BOMBA. *Search and Rescue Team Assistant*: To support the Team Leader and take charge in their absence. *Assembly Area Marshall*: To control the occupants at the assembly area, ensures their safety, keeps an updated name list, and reports to the Incident Commander regarding any injuries or missing persons. *Assembly Area Marshall Assistant*: To support the Marshall and takes charge in their absence. *Traffic Team Leader*: Ensures emergency routes are clear, guides emergency vehicles, and controls traffic during evacuations. *Traffic Team Assistant*: To support the Team Leader and takes charge in their absence. *Technical Team Leader*: Identifies and shuts down power supplies if needed, locates firefighting systems and water sources,

and assists BOMBA with information. *Technical Team Assistant*: To supports the Team Leader and takes charge in their absence. *Medical Team Leader*: Instruct First Aider, identifies safe treatment areas, ensures injured victims are treated, arranges ambulances, and reports to the Incident Commander. *First-Aider*: Provides first aid, assist the Medical Team Leader, and reports on injured persons. *Media Team Leader*: Assist media personnel in obtaining information from the Incident Commander and prevents unauthorized photography or videography.

Conclusion

The core elements of emergency management are derived from organizational responsibilities under the elements of emergency preparedness, prevention and mitigation. The implementation of ERT under the emergency management of institutions of higher learning can help the management plan the dissemination of effective communication information in the face of emergency situations. This study can help the management of the institution to ensure the safety of its residents as well as improve their respective levels of understanding about emergency measures as a result of training, testing and review of roles and responsibilities of ERT members.

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Conflict of interest

The authors confirm that there is no conflict of interest involve with any parties in this research study.

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