Emergency Preparedness Needs Assessment of
Centralized School Foodservice and Warehousing Operations

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Local school foodservice operations are often at the center of emergency response, which requires proactive emergency preparedness (including emergency readiness, food recalls, and food defense) policies and procedures that provide their communities with a timely response plan designed to protect the health and safety of its members. The goal of this project was to conduct an emergency preparedness needs assessment for centralized school foodservice operations, including warehousing and distribution.

The project consisted of three parts. Part I included a Delphi process and a written questionnaire mailed to a national sample of school foodservice directors to identify emergency preparedness policies and standard operating procedures currently used in centralized school foodservice operations; determine frequency and type of emergency preparedness training and training needs of staff in centralized foodservice operations, including staff responsible for distribution/shipping; and identify barriers to implementing emergency preparedness policies and standard operating procedures. Part II consisted of telephone interviews with school administrators to determine their level of awareness of the importance of emergency preparedness policies and standard operating procedures. Part III consisted of telephone interviews with directors of hospitals, restaurant chains, and food distributors to identify emergency preparedness policies and standard operating procedures of hospitals, large restaurant chains, and food distributors that may be adopted by schools.

The following best practices emerged for school foodservice:

1. Written emergency preparedness plans with standard operating procedures are implemented.

2. Training, including practice drills and/or simulations on a variety of emergency situations, is conducted routinely.

3. Communication plans and procedures, including the ability to integrate communication tools with local response agencies, i.e., police, fire, homeland security and emergency personnel, are in place.

4. Computer operating systems are maintained in a secure area and systems are in place for responding to a crisis, i.e., secondary system, generator backups, satellite operations, etc.

5. An inventory level of food and potable water for emergencies is maintained.

6. Arrangements are in place to secure equipment, supplies, and/or staffing from outside organizations in case of emergencies.