

CHAPTER

17

MAJOR HAZARDS EDUCATION IN FRANCE

Sylvette Pierron

*French Institute
of Instructors in
Major Hazards
and Environmental
Protection, France*

Michel Thomas

*Local Fire and
Rescue Services,
Grasse, France*

Abstract: This paper presents two school safety training programmes that have been widely implemented in schools at national and regional levels in France. The SESAM plan (School Emergency Standardised Answer in the case of Major accident) is used in schools throughout France, and the "Prevention – First Gestures" fire safety programme has been delivered to several thousand students in the Grasse area in the south of France.

Background to the SESAM plan

In the early 1990s, a national network of instructors was created by the Ministry of the Environment in France to provide resource staff, including teachers and specialists, in the area of major hazards education. Staff were assigned to all 30 *academies* or school districts in France to foster a risk awareness culture in the educational sector over the period of compulsory education. These resource staff report to a school district co-ordinator, who is trained and appointed by the *recteur* or head of the school district.

In 1995, a crisis management tool for school principals, known as the SESAM plan (School Emergency Standardised Answer in the case of Major accident), was developed by a working party of emergency specialists within the network of instructors. The plan was subsequently approved by the French ministries of the Environment, Education and Home Office. In 1998, the French Institute of Instructors in Major Hazards and Environmental Protection (IFFO-RME) was established by the Ministry of the Environment to facilitate implementing SESAM and to train instructors.

The plan has two principal objectives:

- To introduce risk awareness into civic culture through education and training for students, staff and the educational community.
- To help schools develop a strategy to ensure the safety of students and staff in the event of a major emergency.

The SESAM plan defines the role of each member of the emergency team, who are chosen by the school principal and are responsible for implementing the plan. It also describes the steps involved in carrying out the emergency plans. The SESAM plan framework can be found on the IFFO-RME Web site at www.IFFO-RME.fr.

In 2002, the main elements of the SESAM plan were incorporated into each school's safety plan (PPMS or *plan particulier de mise en sûreté*); the PPMS were made compulsory in national education the same year. The PPMS is tailored to the specific circumstances of each school (e.g. school environment, number of students, type of buildings), to the type of classroom activity at the time of the emergency (e.g. lessons, break times, sports or cultural activities off the school premises), and to the specific risk to which the school may be exposed (e.g. natural or technological hazards, conflict, fire). It contains procedures for evacuation to a shelter and containment of an emergency.

Implementing the SESAM plan

A number of strategies are currently used to facilitate the national implementation of the SESAM plan:

- *Training.* The aim of SESAM is to provide safety education and training for the educational community. Teaching and non-teaching staff – teachers, nurses, management and maintenance staff – can participate in vocational training courses. Initial training is also provided for school district administrators. In addition, a number of specialised courses have been organised, including initial response training for students and teaching staff, which encourages responsible behaviour based on mutual respect and assistance.
- *Establishment of a working party.* A working party was set up with the purpose of identifying risks, resource staff, appropriate containment areas, school access and evacuation routes, and logistical resources.
- *Civic education.* Issues of risk awareness and individual and community behaviour and responsibilities are an important part of the education process.
- *Dissemination.* Information about the plan will be disseminated in a standardised format by schools to parents, supervisors and emergency services.
- *Evaluation.* A full-scale evaluation exercise will be undertaken to ensure that plans are updated each year to meet new specifications.

The SESAM plan is an effective education and training instrument for students, staff and others. The SESAM plan has been adopted in all schools in the principality of Monaco, and translated into Bulgarian, English and Turkish. It has also been discussed in the context of the Council of Europe EUR-OPA Major Hazards Agreement. A number of countries have adapted the plan's methodology to other types and areas of risk, such as sports stadiums, libraries and leisure centres.

Prevention – First Gestures programme

The Prevention – First Gestures programme is organised by the local fire and rescue services in the Grasse area in the south of France, in co-operation with the national education PPMS plans, police, local councils and other partners. The objective of the programme is to build community awareness of risk prevention by teaching adults and students how to evaluate hazards in a variety of situations, such as on the school bus, at school and at home. The programme encourages all individuals to actively participate in improving their own security and to increase the security awareness of others. Thus, all training programme participants understand the importance of watchfulness, can facilitate the intervention of the fire brigade and general dissemination of information to the public on major risks, are informed about rates of domestic and road accidents, and are able to initiate steps to reduce community panic.

The programme builds community awareness using a four-step approach:

- *Level 1* focuses on *identifying individual's knowledge* in terms of recognising hazard and understanding one's own reactions to hazard.
- *Level 2* focuses on *moving towards an understanding of hazards*; the "first gestures" can be acquired in 90 seconds.
- *Level 3* focuses on *assimilating the principles of hazards*, which involves appraising foreseeable and unforeseeable hazards.
- *Level 4* represents the "ideal", which is the creation of a *culture of risk prevention*. This can be achieved through permanent training and appraisal.

The seven-hour programme has been designed for students in secondary, primary and pre-primary education. In secondary education, each school is assigned a "correspondent" for the programme, who may be a teacher or parent; and four students from each class are trained as "prevention assistants", who are responsible to the "referee teacher". The assistants' role is to assist the teacher in case of a problem and increase awareness of the principles of the Prevention – First Gestures programme among fellow students. Assistants must also organise an exhibition on local risks. In primary schools, the referee teacher trains students on how to respond and behave in an emergency. In pre-primary schools, the correspondent instructs students to watch adults and practice the "first gestures".

Between 1996 and December 2002, more than 6 200 people in the Grasse area have participated in the Prevention – First Gestures programme. Since 1999, over 3 300 students have been involved in the programme, including 663 prevention assistants, 153 referee teachers and 166 school classes. More than 5 000 students and 300 adults have participated in training programmes about school buses.