



SENTRY
INSURANCE

Planning for Workplace Emergencies

Nobody expects an emergency or disaster. Yet, the simple truth is that emergencies and disasters can strike anytime and anywhere. The best way to protect yourself, your employees and your business is to develop an emergency-response plan before an emergency occurs.

You can easily put together a comprehensive emergency-response plan that highlights all types of potential emergencies, including:

- Floods
- Earthquakes
- Hurricanes
- Tornadoes
- Fires
- Toxic gas releases
- Chemical spills
- Hazardous substances
- Radiological accidents
- Explosions
- Civil disturbances
- Workplace violence

An emergency-response plan outlines the procedures to be carried out when an emergency occurs. Your management team and employees should be included in planning, developing and implementing your emergency-response plan.

Your emergency-response plan should include:

- Methods for reporting emergencies
- Evacuation policies
- Emergency escape procedures and route assignments, such as floor plans, workplace maps and safe or refuge areas
- Names, titles, departments and telephone numbers of individuals both within and outside your company to contact for additional information or explanation of duties and responsibilities
- Procedures for employees who remain to perform or shut down critical plant operations, operate fire extinguishers or perform other essential services before evacuating
- Rescue and medical duties for designated individuals
- An assembly location and procedures to account for employees following evacuation
- The site of an alternative communications center to be used in the event of a fire or explosion
- A secured on- or off-site location to store originals or duplicate copies of accounting records, legal documents, your employees' emergency contact lists and other essential records



Planning for Workplace Emergencies Continued

When preparing your emergency-response plan, formulate evacuation procedures. A disorganized evacuation can result in confusion, injury and property damage. When developing these procedures consider:

- Conditions under which an evacuation would be necessary
- A clear chain of command and designation of the person authorized to order an evacuation or shutdown
- Evacuation routes and exits. Post these procedures where they are easily accessible to all employees
- Clearly marked and unobstructed routes and exits that are wide enough to accommodate evacuating personnel
- Procedures for assisting people with special needs (e.g., disabilities or inability to speak English)
- Designation of which, if any, employees will continue or shut down critical operations during an evacuation

Select a responsible individual to lead and coordinate the evacuation plan. The coordinator should be responsible for:

- Assessing the situation to determine whether an emergency requires activating emergency procedures
- Supervising all efforts in the area, including evacuating personnel
- Coordinating outside emergency services, such as medical aid and local fire departments
- Directing the shutdown of plant operations when required

In addition to a coordinator, you may want to designate others to help move employees to safety. Those designated to assist in emergencies should be aware of individuals with special needs who require extra assistance, how to use the buddy system and hazardous areas to avoid during an emergency evacuation.

Your inability to properly alert employees in the event of an evacuation may result in serious injuries or fatalities. In order to alert employees:

- Make sure alarms are recognized as a signal to evacuate the work area or perform identified actions
- Make available an emergency communications system such as a public address system, portable radio unit or other means to notify employees of the emergency and to contact local law enforcement, the fire department, etc.
- Ensure that alarms are able to be heard, seen or otherwise perceived by everyone in the workplace. Consider an auxiliary power supply in the event that electricity is shut off



Planning for Workplace Emergencies Continued

In the event of emergency, local officials may order you to evacuate your premises. In some cases, they may instruct you to shut off the water, gas and electricity. If you have access to radio or television, listen to newscasts and follow official orders.

If an evacuation is ordered, it is critical to account for all employees. Confusion in assembly areas can lead to delays in rescuing anyone trapped in the building or unnecessary and dangerous search-and-rescue operations. To ensure the fastest, most accurate accountability of your employees:

- Designate assembly areas where employees should gather
- Take a head count after the evacuation. Identify the names and last known locations of anyone not accounted for and pass them to the official in charge
- Establish a method for accounting for non-employees (i.e., suppliers and customers)
- Implement procedures for further evacuation in case the incident expands. This may require sending employees home by normal means or providing them with transportation to an off-site location

Educate your employees about the types of emergencies that may occur and provide emergency-response training on how they are expected to respond. Determine your training requirements by the size of your workplace and workforce, processes used, materials handled and the availability of on site or outside resources. Review your plan with all your employees and consider additional training when:

- New employees are hired
- New equipment, materials or processes are introduced into the workplace
- Layout or design of the facility changes

Ensure your employees understand the functions and elements of your emergency-response plan, including types of potential emergencies, reporting procedures, alarm systems, evacuation plans and shutdown procedures.

Once your employees have been trained, hold practice drills. Include outside resources whenever possible, such as fire and police departments. After each drill, gather management and employees to evaluate the effectiveness of the drill. Identify the strengths and weaknesses of your plan and make improvements as needed.

Even if your business is properly prepared for an emergency, injuries may still occur. Investigate ways to provide medical and first aid services and make arrangements with nearby medical facilities. If an infirmary, clinic or hospital is not close by, ensure that on-site person(s) have adequate training in first aid. The American Red Cross, local safety councils, fire departments or other resources can provide training.



Planning for Workplace Emergencies Continued

Consult with a physician to order appropriate first aid supplies for emergencies. Medical personnel must be accessible to provide advice and consultation in resolving health problems in the workplace.

OSHA provides resources that can help you formulate your emergency-response plan. These include:

- 29 CFR 1910.38(a)
- 29 CFR 1910.120(q), Hazardous Waste Operations and Emergency Response
- 29 CFR 1910.156, Fire Brigades
- 29 CFR 1910.146(k), Permit-Required Confined Spaces.

OSHA Publication 3122, Principal Emergency Response and Preparedness Requirements in OSHA Standards and Guidance for Safety and Health Problems, provides a broad view of emergency planning requirements across OSHA standards. Visit www.osha.gov for more information.

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