

Emergency Preparedness

November 2010

When was the last time you were involved with a convenient emergency? For most of us, emergency preparation goes all the way back to childhood. Remember when the school's fire alarm sounded, we lined up and exited the building in an orderly fashion as the teachers and principals watched everyone. Some of us may have not understood the purpose of those days, but if a real emergency were to occur, the method of getting to a safe place would have been established.

That basic idea is just as important on the projects and sites in which an emergency situation could put workers in danger. That's what makes developing an emergency action plan crucial. After all, since no two sites are alike, no two plans will be alike. Each site poses its own unique set of hazards, and the steps outlined here will help provide core groundwork to any plan.

First, consider your circumstances. What type of emergency situations can you envision occurring on your site?

Don't forget to consider any neighboring facilities that may pose a hazard to your site as well.

Second, determine your actions. Once you've identified the types of emergencies that could occur, determine the actions you want your employees to take in each situation. Where do you want your workers to go? Should they contact anyone? What route should they take for an evacuation? (Consider reviewing these plans with the facility/site to confirm that any unknown hazards that would alternate your evacuation or rally point are addressed). Create rally points. Have specific locations identified for each emergency. In some instances, the same location could serve as your rally point for multiple emergency plans, but also having an alternate rally point in place would be wise in case an unforeseeable situation made your first location unsafe. Either way, having those areas identified is critical.

Third, verify your routes. What good is a rally point if your workers can't reach them? Regular inspections of your evacuation routes are necessary to ensure that no obstructions have emerged. Reminding your workers to keep these areas clear of materials, debris, tools, etc. is vital to ensuring a safe exit and compliance with the NFPA Life Safety Code.

Fourth, Practice. Plans can look good on paper, but when put to the test, sometimes they're not as practical as we envisioned. Practice your plan to ensure that everybody acts accordingly. This is a fantastic time to answer any questions and get feedback from your workers about your plan.

Fifth, account for everyone. You need to be able to verify that everyone that was onsite is evacuated. This will prevent having an emergency responder risk there life looking for someone that isn't on site.

Finally, Review. Buildings and work sites are constantly changing. Plans you established early in the project may need to be updated to account for these changes and to ensure the right course of action is taken.

What happens if a harmful chemical were to be released in an office building? How should your workers react if a fire alarm is sounded? We may not have the ability to anticipate every emergency situation, but we do have a responsibility to take a proactive approach and plan for the unexpected. Next time you hear, "this is not a drill"...how will those words make you feel? Having a plan in place will help prevent problems, panic and pandemonium.



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Aaron Wissen
Safety Resources, Inc.

Newsletter Spotlight

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