

An emergency action plan outlines the actions employees should take in the event of a fire or other emergency situation. Well-developed plans and proper employee training may result in fewer and less severe injuries and less structural damage to the facility during emergencies.

Emergency Action Plan Components

Emergency action plans should address each of the following elements:

- Preferred procedures for reporting emergencies
- Description of alarm system used to notify employees
- Evacuation policy, procedures and escape route assignments
- Procedures for employees who remain on-site after alarm sounds
- Procedures to account for employees after evacuation
- Names and responsibilities of employees assigned to rescue and medical tasks
- Description of how employees will be informed and trained on contents of the plan
- Identification of employees to contact for additional information on the plan
- List of key personnel to contact during off-hour emergencies

Developing a Plan

Prior to developing a plan, your organization should determine what natural and man-made emergencies could occur in your facility. Information on naturally occurring disasters can be researched through city and county authorities, the National Weather Bureau and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Man-made emergencies will vary depending on your organization's operations, but a partial list includes:

- Chemical Spills
- Workplace Violence
- Bomb Threats
- Workplace Accidents
- Gas Leaks
- Arson



Officials with expertise in these types of emergencies should be invited into your facility to survey and make suggestions. To ensure a more complete emergency action plan, include employees in the planning process. Encourage them to offer suggestions about potential hazards, worst-case scenarios and proper emergency responses.

Remember, plans will vary by organization due to specific operations, reporting procedures and desired responses; however, all plans should, at a minimum, follow OSHA guidelines.

Reporting Emergencies

For your plan to be effective, employees must know the proper method for reporting emergencies. Some organizations use internal telephone numbers, intercoms or manual pull stations to notify employees. Regardless of which method your organization chooses, each employee should be trained on the importance of reporting emergencies immediately.

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Alarm Systems

Once an emergency is reported, typically an alarm system notifies employees so they can take the appropriate actions to perform their assigned duties. Alarms must be distinctive and recognized by all employees, which may require both audio and visual annunciation. Alarms must also be capable of being recognized above ambient noise and light levels. A sequence of horn blows or different types of alarms (bells, horns, etc.) can be used to signal different emergency situations.

According to OSHA, for companies with 10 or fewer employees, direct voice communication is an acceptable procedure for announcing an emergency, provided that all employees can hear the person speaking the warning.

Alarm systems should be tested for reliability and adequacy every two months and should be restored to normal operating condition after each test. Backup systems, such as telephones or employee messengers, should be provided and be on alert anytime the primary alarm system is out of service.

Evacuation

Each emergency action plan should identify when and how employees are to respond to emergencies outlined in the plan. You may determine that your employees should assemble in one area of the workplace if threatened by a tornado, stay at their workstations and shelter in place for a chemical spill on an adjacent highway and evacuate to an exterior location in the event of a fire.

Most companies create evacuation maps that designate primary and secondary exit route assignments. These maps should include locations of exits, assembly points and equipment (fire extinguishers, first aid kits, spill kits, etc.) that may be needed in an emergency. NFPA 101® Life Safety Code requires that all exit routes be:

- Unlikely to expose evacuating personnel to additional hazards
- Clearly marked and well-lit

- Wide enough to accommodate the number of people
- Unobstructed and clear of debris at all times

Training

Before implementing the emergency action plan, employees should review the plan and understand their roles and required actions in the event of an emergency. A sufficient number of employees should be trained to assist in the safe and orderly evacuation of personnel from the facility. All new employees should be trained on those parts of the plan that affect them, and all employees should receive refresher training annually.

For Additional Information

Occupational Safety & Health Administration:

www.osha.gov

- Emergency Action Plan Checklist

National Safety Council: www.nsc.org

- Planning for the unexpected: How to prepare your workplace for a natural disaster

EMC Insurance Companies: www.emcins.com

- Tech Sheets