

6.2: Emergency Action Plans

Emergency Action Plans

An emergency action plan (EAP) is a written document (may be communicated orally if less than 10 employees) required by OSHA standards. [29 CFR 1910.38(a)] The purpose of an EAP is to facilitate and organize employer and employee actions during workplace emergencies. The primary goal of the plan is to get employees away (evacuate or isolate) from the emergency event or condition. Well developed emergency plans and proper employee training (such that employees understand their roles and responsibilities within the plan) will result in fewer and less severe employee injuries and less structural damage to the facility during emergencies. A poorly prepared plan, likely will lead to a disorganized evacuation or emergency response, resulting in confusion, injury, and property damage.

Fight or Flee

A fire is the most common type of emergency for which small businesses must plan. Evacuation plans that designate or require some or all of the employees to fight fires with portable fire extinguishers increase the level of complexity of the plan and the level of training that must be provided employees.

Fire, Rescue, or Medical Services

In an emergency most of us are quickly moved away from the hazardous environments created during emergency situations. However there usually remains a group of dedicated and well-trained professional emergency responders and medical service personnel which may be tasked with containing and mitigating these incidents, rescuing individuals at-risk, and providing medical assistance to the injured.

Sheltering in Place

There are some emergencies where evacuation is not the safest action for employees. When chemical, biological, or radiological contaminants are released into the environment in such a quantity and/or proximity to a place of business it is usually safer to remain indoors rather than to evacuate employees.

Sheltering in place may also be the safest action when the emergency involves criminal activity, domestic violence or terrorist activity.

Primary Elements of the Plan

An emergency plan must contain at a minimum the following elements:

1. Procedures for reporting a fire or other emergency;
2. Procedures for emergency evacuation, including type of evacuation and exit route assignments
3. Procedures to be followed by employees who remain to operate critical plant operations before they evacuate;
4. Procedures to account for all employees after evacuation;
5. Procedures to be followed by employees performing rescue or medical duties;
6. The name or job title of every employee who may be contacted by employees who need more information about the plan or an explanation of their duties under the plan.

The EAP must describe the covered emergencies and include external contact and resource information. The plan must also discuss the requirements of any emergency alert or alarm system, frequency of system testing, training requirements, and is subject to annual review.

Typical emergencies include Fire, Earthquake, Severe Weather, Chemical and Biological Releases, Explosions, Violence, Civil Disturbance, Medical.

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