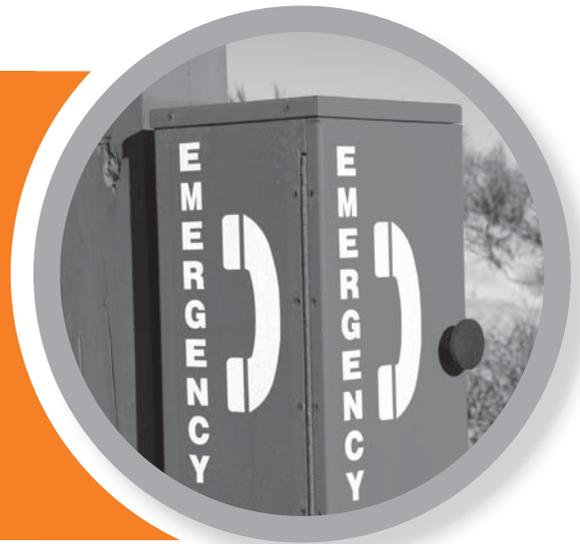


Reacting to a worker's emergency

by Mike Ely

Before you begin

- Review your existing emergency action plan.
- Discuss your emergency action plan with local fire and police department to ensure it is adequate.
- Review records of emergency drills.
- Check the condition of your emergency equipment.
- Review the chain of command for emergency incidents.
- Review the call list for emergency incidents.



Discussion

Are you prepared for an emergency when it happens in your workplace? If your workplace has more than 10 employees, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) requires a written emergency action plan. At a minimum, your emergency action plan must include the following:

- A preferred method for reporting fires and other emergencies;
- An evacuation policy and procedure;
- Emergency escape procedures and route assignments such as floor plans, workplace maps and safe or refuge areas;
- Names, titles, departments and telephone numbers of people within and outside your company to contact for additional information or an explanation of their duties and responsibilities under the emergency plan;
- Procedures for employees who remain to perform or shut down critical plant operations, operate fire extinguishers or perform other essential services that cannot be shut down for every emergency alarm before evacuating.

Review rescue and medical duties for any workers you designate to perform them. You may want to determine an assembly location and procedures to account for employees after an evacuation. In addition, you must put into place methods to alert employees when an emergency situation is taking place.

The alarms must be distinctive and recognized by employees as a signal to take the appropriate action. That action may be to evacuate or seek shelter in a safe location. Everyone in the workplace must be able to hear, see or otherwise perceive the signal.

Training and drills

Training and drills are a major part of an emergency action plan. It does no good to have a plan that employees are not familiar with or have not practiced. Review these suggestions for training employees about emergency procedures in your workplace.

- Train like it is for real. You will be better prepared for the real thing, the more the training reflects reality.
- Ensure your supervisors and employees know how to react, and they practice an accountability system.
- Coordinate your training with local authorities and your alarm company.
- When you finish the training, have a meeting immediately following it to review what went right and what went wrong.
- Develop action items and assign their completion to employees so they may follow-up on them.
- Implement your action items into your emergency action plan and continue with the training and drills.

Obtain and maintain any special equipment to deal with anticipated emergencies. Designate employees you want to train in the equipment's proper use. This may include respiratory protection, chemical-resistant suits, hand/head/eye protection or other specialized equipment made necessary by the nature of your business.

Group action

- Identify emergency situations that could develop in your facility.
- Do participants know what to do in case of the situations identified?
- Do you have co-workers who will need assistance during an emergency?
- Are there locked/blocked doors or non-functional emergency devices (alarms, emergency lights, exit signs, etc.) that will keep participants from responding properly?
- Do you have an emergency plan for your family at home?
- Have any of your employees participated in an emergency?
- What is the top priority in an emergency situation?

Conclusion

By their nature, emergencies are unannounced. When an emergency strikes, proper planning and training is the only way you may protect yourself.

Because you have not had an emergency in your facility does not mean you will not have one tomorrow. Take the time to plan, prepare and train. If you do have an emergency, you will know what to do. This will help increase the chance of a favorable outcome for what could otherwise be a tragic event. In an emergency, there is only one priority - the preservation of human life.

References

Web sites

How to Plan for Workplace Emergencies and Evacuations (OSHA): <http://www.osha.gov/Publications/osha3088.pdf>

Emergency Management Guide for Business and Industry (Federal Emergency Management Agency): <http://www.fema.gov/business/guide/index.shtm>

Emergency Planning Guide (California Institute of Technology): http://www.safety.caltech.edu/documents/40-emergency_planning_guide.pdf

Emergency Response Resources (NIOSH): <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/emres/business.html>

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