



Emergency Response Safety Meeting Guidelines

Meeting Objectives

This training session will help employees better understand how to prepare for and respond to emergencies in the workplace. Employees will learn about evacuation routes, emergency alarms, responding to fire or smoke, responding to a chemical spill, responding to natural disasters, etc. Employees will also learn how to prepare their home and families for emergencies.

Suggested Materials to Have on Hand

- Emergency action plan
- Map showing evacuation routes
- Disaster supply kit

Introduction/Overview

Every employee needs to be prepared for emergencies and know how to safely respond to various workplace emergencies. Examples of potential workplace emergencies that may require preparation and action, such as evacuation, include:

- Fire or smoke
- Chemical spills
- Natural disasters
- Extended power outages
- Bomb threats
- Biological agents
- Workplace violence

OSHA Regulations

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) requires employers to have a written emergency action plan, according to 29 CFR 1910.38, which must contain information such as:

- Alarm systems and other means of reporting emergencies
- Evacuation procedures
- Exit routes identified
- Other employee responsibilities during emergencies (in addition to evacuation)
- Procedures to account for all employees after evacuation

- Rescue and medical duties
- Employee training requirements

It is important that all employees read and understand the written emergency action plan. Tell employees where they can find copies of your company's Emergency Action Plan.

Evacuation Procedures

- Recognize the evacuation signal
- Listen for any specific evacuation instructions
- Shut down nearby equipment
- Follow the nearest exit route
- Proceed to the designated assembly area

Discuss any different evacuation procedures specific to your company.

Evacuation Assignments

These evacuation assignments should be described in the Emergency Action Plan. Employees with assignments must be adequately trained.

Evacuation Coordinator—Walk through a specific area to make sure all personnel are clear of areas, including offices, cubicles, and bathrooms. Look for panicky, injured, or disabled workers that may need help.

Head Count—Count the workers that have reported to the designated assembly areas to make sure everyone is safely out. Inform fire department personnel of the head count.

First aid and CPR—Designate employees trained in first aid and CPR to grab a first-aid kit before evacuating so the supplies are available in case someone is injured during the evacuation. Those trained employees would be responsible for treating injured employees at the evacuation meeting areas.

Shut Down Machinery—Designate some workers to shut down critical machinery or equipment before evacuating if it is safe to do so.

Evacuation Assistant—Assist people that need help evacuating. A co-worker in a wheelchair or a co-worker using crutches because of a leg injury may require assistance to exit the building.

Discuss any specific evacuation assignments that are described in your company's Emergency Action Plan.

Exit Routes

Unobstructed Exit Routes

It is extremely important to maintain exit routes free of obstructions. Remember, exit routes are not just the doors or stairwells that lead outside. Exit routes start at any point in the building.

- Do not block exit doors.
- Stairwells cannot be used for extra storage.

- Keep file cabinets and bookshelves out of main aisles or hallways that are used as access ways to exit doors.
- Do not store janitorial equipment or extra paper for the copy machine in exit routes.

Exit routes cannot go through rooms that might be locked. If access to the door that leads outside requires employees to go through an office, lunchroom, or some other room with lockable doors, then that is not an exit route and should be marked as such. To be an official exit route, the lock on the door to the room must be removed so employees can go unimpeded through the room and out the exit door.

Discuss any exit routes that employees feel might be partially blocked.

Keep Dangerous Items Away from Exit Routes

Minimize potential dangers to employees during an evacuation. Do not require employees to travel toward areas where hazardous chemicals are stored unless the exit route is protected or specially designed for the area.

Keep exit routes free of explosive or highly flammable chemicals and flammable items like furnishings, decorations, cardboard, and paper. These items could be ignited by the high temperature of a nearby fire and block the exit in an emergency.

Remember, exit routes include hallways, aisles, walkways, stairwells, lobbies, and other areas that must be passed through on the way to the exit door that leads outside. Do not store flammable or toxic substances in these areas.

Ask employees if any dangerous items are stored along exit routes.

Marking Exits

Each exit or doorway leading outside must be marked with a clearly visible and distinctive sign that reads "EXIT." The exit sign must have distinctive colors that do not blend into the background. The exit signs cannot be obstructed or concealed in any way. Additional signs on the door or decorations may obscure the exit signs.

Exit routes must be illuminated. Emergency lighting must be installed in case of a power outage. Check emergency lighting on a regular basis.

Signs must be posted along the exit routes that indicate the direction of travel to the nearest exit. These signs will typically read "EXIT" and include an arrow indicating the direction to the exit.

Show employees the exit signs along the exit routes in your work area.

Non-Exit Doors

Any non-exit doorway or passage that might be mistaken for an exit must be marked with a sign that reads "NOT AN EXIT" or a sign that indicates the door's actual use, such as "Basement" or "Closet."

Discuss any non-exit doors and passageways in your work area that might be mistaken for exit routes.

Emergency Alarms

Notify others of emergency situations. Do not respond to a chemical spill, fire, or medical emergency without the required training. Even for employees trained to respond, the first thing to do is notify others so that help will be on the way.

Alarm systems must have a distinctive signal that warns employees of emergencies. The key word is "distinctive" The alarm cannot sound like other common noises in the workplace, such as a buzzer or alarm on production equipment.

Also, any visual signals must be different from the other lights in the facility. Employees must know that the emergency alarm signal indicates an emergency and is not just another workplace noise or light. The emergency alarm must be seen and heard in every area of the workplace.

The Emergency Action Plan should describe automatic alarms, manual alarms, and any emergency backup alarms. Automatic alarms are usually attached to sprinkler systems or other automatic fire extinguishing equipment. Manual alarm systems and emergency backup alarms might include:

- Manual fire alarm box
- Public address system
- Phones or radios
- Air horns
- Shouting to warn others

Learn about the alarm systems used by your company. Know what they sound like so you can recognize them when you hear them. Know how to activate alarms. Learn how to use the paging system. Know how to use pull-down alarms, air horns, and other backup alarm systems.

Discuss the alarm systems used in your workplace. Also explain how to use the paging system in your workplace.

Testing Alarm Systems

Alarm systems should be tested on a regular basis. Check each trigger device (e.g., manual fire alarm box) at least annually. Make sure the alarm is reliable and will work when it is needed. Alarm testing is also done to make sure the alarm can be seen and heard throughout the workplace.

Monitored alarm systems that send a signal to an outside alarm-monitoring company must be tested at least annually to make sure the monitoring company is receiving an immediate signal. Monitoring companies will inform the police and fire departments when they receive a signal from a company's alarm system.

Emergency Information

Post emergency information where all employees have access to the numbers. Consider posting the emergency information near all phones or on employee bulletin boards. Include phone numbers and addresses for the following:

- Police
- Fire department
- Hospital
- Clinic
- Chemical spill emergency response team

Discuss what emergency information has been posted at your company and where employees can find that information.

Designated Meeting Area

Know your designated evacuation meeting or assembly area.

For many companies, the meeting area might be just across the street or on the far side of the parking lot. Large industrial facilities may have multiple assembly areas. Workplaces in high-rise buildings in the city may have meeting areas a block or two away from the building.

It is very important that you proceed directly to your designated meeting area. Do not go to your car or hang out with friends in another department or at another meeting location.

A person will be assigned to conduct a head count at your assembly area. The purpose of the head count is to make sure all personnel are safely out of the building. We don't want someone from the fire department risking his or her life searching in a burning building while you are in your car listening to the radio.

First Aid

If your clothing is on fire

- Stop.
- Drop to the floor.
- Roll to smother the flames.

If someone else is on fire-wrap the person in a blanket or coat and help to smother the fire.

Smoke inhalation—get some fresh air. If a person is not breathing because of smoke inhalation, move the person out of the building and then apply CPR.

Know the people in your workplace who are trained in first aid and CPR. Know who is assigned to bring the first-aid kit to your evacuation assembly area.

Evacuation Drills

Conduct evacuation drills until evacuation becomes second nature. You should not have to think about what to do or where to go.

Participate in evacuation drills. We all should know the evacuation procedures so well that we would be able to evacuate the building with our eyes closed. We may not have the use of our sight in an emergency because of thick smoke, chemical fumes, or power outages.

Use drills to test and improve your Emergency Action Plan. Ask questions such as:

- Did every employee see or hear the alarms?
- Were all evacuation routes clear of obstructions?
- Was a work area sweep conducted to make sure all personnel were clear?
- Was machinery shut down?
- Were all workers accounted for in the assembly area?
- Did someone assist disabled workers?

- Were first-aid supplies available?

Evaluate the drill, review the results, modify the plan, and retrain all workers as necessary.

Employee Training

Employees must receive regular training, including drills, on the information contained in the Emergency Action Plan. Employees must know the locations of all evacuation routes and understand the importance of keeping exit routes clear.

Employees must learn how to recognize alarm signals and know where to assemble once they exit the building.

Employees with evacuation assignments require additional training so they can successfully complete their assignments during an emergency.

Chemical Spills

Have a plan for responding to spills of chemicals kept in your work area. Part of this plan includes having the appropriate spill cleanup supplies and personal protective equipment available for trained employees to use in an emergency.

Do not respond to a chemical spill unless you have received special training to respond to that spill. The correct response for most workers will be to:

- Evacuate the immediate area.
- Notify employees in the immediate area and the emergency response team.
- Secure the area around the spill to keep unauthorized people away from the spill.

Discuss how employees in your workplace should respond to a chemical spill. If applicable, discuss which employees are part of your company's chemical spill response team.

Fires

Your company's Emergency Action Plan will discuss how employees should respond to smoke or fire in the workplace. Most employees will respond to fires by following these steps:

- Notify others of the fire, including the fire department.
- Evacuate by following the nearest exit route.
- Proceed to the designated assembly area.

However, some employees may be trained to respond to fires and smoke in an effort to control or extinguish the fire until the fire department arrives. These employees must be trained to use fire extinguishers, fire hoses, and other fire suppression equipment in your workplace. They must also be trained on the hazards of fighting fires and understand when the fire is too dangerous and they must evacuate.

Discuss the location of fire extinguishers, fire hoses, and other fire suppression equipment in your workplace. Identify who is trained to fight fires in your workplace.

Medical Emergency

Your company's Emergency Action Plan should also discuss how employees should respond to a medical emergency, such as if an employee is seriously injured by machinery, an employee is splashed by chemicals, or an employee has a heart attack. Most employees should respond as follows:

- Notify employees trained in first aid and CPR.
- Call 9-1-1 for an ambulance, if necessary.
- Bring the employee to a first-aid station, or retrieve supplies and bring them to the employee.

All employees need to know the locations of first-aid kits, emergency eyewash stations, emergency showers, and other first-aid supplies or equipment.

Discuss the location of first-aid kits, eyewash stations, and emergency showers in your workplace. Identify who is trained in first aid and CPR in your workplace.

Natural Disasters

Preparing for Natural Disasters

If you live or work in an area that is exposed to the potential of natural disasters, take some of the following precautions.

Earthquake—Secure furniture and other items that may fall over and be damaged or cause injury.

Windstorm—Secure items left outside, such as outdoor furniture. In advance, prepare sheets of plywood cut to fit over your windows and doors. Keep these sheets of plywood on hand with a supply of nails.

Flood—Raise machinery and electrical equipment, and store goods off the ground. Store valuable equipment, such as computer servers, on an upper floor. Secure items that are left outside, such as outdoor furniture.

Evaluate the workplace for potential risks. Have a structural engineer evaluate the building for earthquake preparedness, withstanding the forces of a severe windstorm, and even withstanding the forces of floodwater. Develop a checklist that can be used to inspect the workplace on a periodic basis.

Disaster Supply Kit

Put together a disaster supply kit that contains items such as:

- First-aid kit
- Flashlights
- Battery-powered radio
- Food and water
- Blankets
- Toiletries
- Emergency phone numbers
- Cash and credit cards

Be sure to have enough supplies to take care of your employees or your family for at least a few days. Have other emergency supplies available, such as boards that can be quickly used to cover up windows, and sandbags to protect against floods.

Responding to Natural Disasters

Be prepared and know what to do when a natural disaster occurs.

Earthquake—Protect yourself by hiding under a desk or table, or by standing under a doorframe. Move away from windows. When the earthquake has subsided, exit the building and stand away from buildings or overhead power lines. Turn off gas and electricity.

Windstorm—When threatened by a tornado or hurricane, take shelter in place by going to the center of the building and staying away from all windows. If your building has a designated "safe room" for windstorms, go there at once.

Flood—Move to a higher floor and move important equipment or documents as well if time allows. Turn off electrical power to the building.

Emergencies at Home

Use this knowledge of emergency preparedness for the workplace to make your home safer.

Evacuation

Make sure your family has a few different exit routes. In addition to the front door, designate a door or window on the back side of the house as an exit. If a window is to be used, keep it clear and have a chair or stepstool available so someone can easily climb through.

If your home has a second floor, make sure you have another exit from the second floor in addition to the main stairs. Designate an upstairs window and have an escape ladder available.

Develop an emergency plan covering alarms, fire extinguishers, exit routes, assembly areas, and emergency supplies.

Train your family and conduct a drill at least twice a year.

Finally, take note of the location of exit signs in public areas, such as stores, hotels, shopping malls, sporting venues, and movie theaters, so you are mentally prepared to exit in case of an emergency.

Fire

Purchase a few fire extinguishers for your home and place them in areas such as your kitchen or garage. Show your family how to use the fire extinguishers. Make sure your family knows they should stop, drop, and roll if they are on fire.

Natural Disasters

Put together a disaster supply kit. Prepare your home for the type of natural disaster that is likely to occur in your area. For flooding, prepare sandbags and plastic. For windstorms, prepare plywood to protect your windows and secure outdoor objects. For earthquakes, secure bookshelves, furniture, and other items so they will not fall over.

Develop a plan so your family knows what to do if a natural disaster strikes—especially if your family is separated and phone systems are not working.

Suggested Discussion Questions

1. Where are the exit routes nearest your work area?
2. Describe the basic evacuation procedures.
3. Where are fire extinguishers located in your work area?
4. Where are first-aid kits located in your work area?
5. Where is the evacuation meeting area for your department?
6. Where is emergency information posted in your work area?
7. What do you do if you or someone else is on fire?
8. How do you notify others of an emergency?
9. How should you respond to a chemical spill?
10. Do you have any other questions?

Wrap-Up

Emergency preparedness is very important because all employees must know how to respond to an emergency in the workplace. Employees must know the importance of keeping exit routes clear. Employees must know how to signal emergency alarms. Employees must know how to safely evacuate the workplace and where to meet. Natural disasters could also occur and employees must know how to respond in these situations.

Employees must be reminded on a regular basis how to respond in an emergency. Because emergency preparedness information is not used on a daily basis, it is easy information to forget. Continually train employees on emergency preparedness procedures so everyone responds correctly during an actual emergency.