

Emergency Action Plan ©

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What are you doing to protect your employees and your guests? If you are not considering the safety of all the visitors to your operation consider the possible legal costs or OSHA fines for your inaction! There is no possible way to determine all the situations that may happen at your business, yet there are ways to address the potential common mishaps. This brief article poses numerous questions to assist you in the development or enhancement of your emergency action plan.

Emergency coordination

Do you have a safety director or is that just another hat that the manager wears? Do your department heads know their responsibilities in the event of an emergency?

Emergency contact list

Are the inter-office and home phone numbers for all department heads and emergency service providers readily available? Have you also considered the number for the Center of Disease Control in Atlanta (1-888-329-4232)? Did you ever consider looking up the number for your local poison control center? What about a chemical spill? Do you know the number for the local emergency planning committee or sometimes called the response team? With numerous municipalities in close proximity, dialing 911 may not ensure you the quickest response. Have you ever considered the specialties of the hospitals in your area (burn units, neurological, multiple trauma...)? What about the number for the local medical evacuation helicopter? Other phone numbers may include the gas and propane companies, local ambulance service and local health care facilities.

Fire

Consider the impact of a fire on you operation. Do the employees know the primary and secondary modes of egress? Do they know where to gather so a supervisor may take roll call? Will they assist handicapped employees and/or guests that may need assistance? Do they know what the fire alarm horn sounds like? Do they even react when the alarm is activated? Does your fire suppression system work? (Many years ago, I was conducting a simulated OSHA site tour at a private club and couldn't find the Ansul® inspection sticker on a newly installed system. Shortly after we located

the proper sticker, we were shocked that the piping from the control panel to the kitchen range was not connected!).

Does your office staff take the back up discs when they go to their designated evacuation area?

Do you do the required OSHA annual employee training on how to use fire extinguishers? Have you considered if you even want employees to use fire extinguishers? Do you have a fire brigade?

What if a fire occurs at your pesticide or chemical storage area? Do your employees and Fire Company know what hazards lurk within the area? Do you have the proper four-color regulatory signage? What are your current storage practices? Are your flammables next to oxidizers: corrosives next to reactive chemicals? Is there an open flame source (a gas heater) close to flammables? Do you use metal flameproof lockers to store gasoline, aerosols and other flammables?

Emergency Equipment

Already mentioned are fire extinguishers, sprinklers and alarm systems; yet how well stocked are your first aid stations? Do you have access to emergency generators, chainsaws and building equipment? Where are the flashlights, batteries and candles stored? Do you have eye wash/ shower stations in your pool and chemical storage areas? What about blood clean up and disposal kits? How many defibrillators and oxygen canisters are on the premises and how many staff members are trained?

(A personal note: This author does not believe in the companies that offer drive-up service to restock your first aid stations. When you realize what you are paying for just aspirin and bandages, you are much better off having one of your employees in charge of buying your own supplies from the local drug store! Consider giving the savings back to the employees in some special way.)

Natural Disasters

Depending on your geographic location, there are certain assessments you will have to make regarding mishaps that may occur. The situations may include hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, earthquakes and winter storms. Each potential disaster has numerous facets and the preparedness and warning systems will vary. Some considerations will include who will report to work, who will implement call in/off procedures and materials to prevent damage and/or assist with clean up afterwards.

Other considerations

Nowadays, we are very concerned about the mental stability of those outside our environment.

Robbery / suspicious persons

All operations have experienced robberies and numerous operations use various tools to monitor their operation from security personnel, cameras, coded entry cards to the

good old-fashioned technique of changing the locks. Yet have you ever considered someone coming in off the street for your operational or employee's cash?

Hostage/terrorist situations

Can it happen? Let's hope not. There are a few techniques that employees have to know. The most important is to **remain calm!** Then they should know not to challenge the person(s), do everything asked within the law and always remember that help is on the way. Do not lose hope!

Bomb threats

If you receive a call by phone, remain calm. Listen carefully and be courteous. Try to keep the caller on the phone while you contact the manager or security director. When the caller disconnects, do not hang up the phone. The call may be able to be traced if you do not hang up. A detailed checklist should be developed to make notes on the following items: Male or female: Adult or Juvenile; Approximate Age; Origin of Call; Voice Characteristics; Language; Speech Pattern; Accent; Mannerisms; Background Noise; Also try to get the following information: When will it explode? Certain Hour: __ Time Remaining: __ Where is the bomb?

Elevator failure

Procedures will depend on your operation. With a phone in the cab: Use the emergency phone and you will be connected to the _____.
Without a phone: Yell for assistance!

Suspicious Mail

Chemical or biological warfare is now a new threat that we may encounter. Past practices of just opening all incoming mail assuming it is a payment on account just isn't safe anymore. In order to protect employees consider all mail without a return address as suspect. The postal service recently issued information regarding suspect mail that can be found at www.usps.gov.

Location of and procedures to shut off gas, water and electrical systems

Are there certain situations when you want any of these items shut down? Who will implement the emergency shut down procedures and do all of your key staff members know of the various locations of the shut off valves or switches?

Fatality Procedures

Hopefully, you will never have to address this situation. The first thing to realized if you experience an employee fatality or an incident that requires the hospital admittance of three or more employees, you MUST call OSHA and report the incident with eight hours.

If you do have an employee fatality, some items to consider for your plan will include: who will make the initial family contact; send condolence notes; assist with funeral

arrangements; life insurance benefits; COBRA and other medical and dental coverage for the family and the possible arrangement for meals.

The Next Step

Taking the time to develop an emergency action (or reaction) plan can seem like a daunting task especially with all the other priorities that are on one's plate. I can only think of the old adage of how does one eat an elephant? Answer: One bite at a time.

The input of management and line employees is absolutely invaluable as each person brings their own perspective and further, if all your employees assist with the development of the plan, they are more than likely to energetically involved with the implementation.

It is recommended to start by making copies of your building plans and then you may commence forming teams from various departments and giving each team a section of this article to work on. Ensure you assign responsibility, give a deadline and provide the necessary resources to do their duties.

Good Luck! And I wish you never have to implement any of these procedures!