

BULLETIN

Risk Control

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Are You Prepared To Handle An Office Emergency?

It is likely that if an emergency occurs in your District, you currently have a response plan in place. Your District might have or participate with the local hazardous material response team should a serious chemical spill occur at one of your facilities. You probably participate in a mutual aid agreement with other Districts should a water line break or other emergency exceed your capabilities.

Are you as well prepared within your own District office if an employee or visitor has a medical emergency? If a fire occurs on your premises, or an earthquake causes structural damage, do your employees know how to react, where to go, and from whom to take instructions? Do you drill at least annually to test your reactions to such events?

If your answer is "Yes," congratulations! You have been successful in fulfilling your responsibilities to your employees and customers. If you answered "No", you are probably not alone. Take this as an opportunity to develop and implement an emergency preparedness plan that will be well received.

Emergency preparedness procedures should be reviewed with all new hires, and annually with existing employees. You will want to share some of the specific incidents that they might be called on to deal with, starting with medical and fire emergencies.

Employee Training

Your employee manual should provide information on the responsibilities and expectations of employees during a medical, fire, or other emergency. Providing hands-on orientation and annual safety exercises will improve the probability that your safety program will be carried out as planned.

New Employees

Your current procedure for welcoming new employees may be similar to what has been done for years: the new employee meets with the office manager and their immediate supervisor, and then is introduced around the

office to their new colleagues. Making new employees feel comfortable should be encouraged, but you also should recognize an opportunity to begin emergency training.

It is recommended to review the emergency response sections of the manual with the employee, and follow this up immediately with a "safety orientation" of the entire office. Show the new employee where the fire extinguishers are located and how they operate, where the designated assembly area is located, where fire doors are located, and which employees are trained in first aid and CPR. These "safety orientations" can be



combined with introductions around the office, but new employees should clearly understand that the priority is safety training and not social introductions.

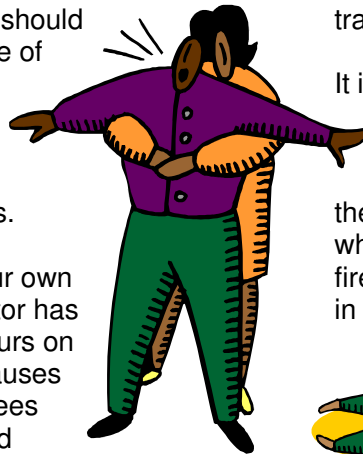
Current Employees

If you do not conduct annual safety reviews with your current staff members, it would be a mistake to assume that they have knowledge of the items mentioned above. Annual training need not be burdensome. Depending on the number of employees at your location, you can perform a single tour, or you can train department managers, who are then responsible for training their staff members on office emergency procedures.

Safety Exercises

We are all familiar with the term "fire drill." When evacuating a building for a fire drill and meeting at the designated assembly area, note not only the speed with which your staff responds, but also the organization. Be certain that exit doors are not blocked, fire doors are operating properly, emergency lighting is operating, and fire extinguishers are properly located and serviceable. Ask your local fire marshal to attend your fire drill and offer suggestions for improvement.

If feasible, conduct a mock medical emergency on your premises. It is wise to remind employees, at least annually, which of their colleagues are trained in first aid and CPR, the location of emergency supplies, and the general procedures to be followed when an emergency arises.



Medical Emergencies

Employees who are certified in first aid and CPR and can be called on in an emergency should be identified. This can be done by having an additional listing on their nameplate, or by posting a roster of trained employees. Employees should know who in their area has this training. If only a few of your employees have training, you might want to encourage it by offering to reimburse employees for the cost of training, or letting them receive training during normal business hours.



CPR face masks and latex or vinyl gloves should be provided to all trained employees who are willing to help in an emergency. A well-stocked first aid kit is required in every office and facility. An assigned individual should be responsible for regularly checking the contents and keeping it stocked with fresh supplies.

Most areas have 911 for emergency response services. If a medical emergency occurs, a designated person should be responsible for calling 911. This person should be able to provide the location address and clear directions to the location during an emergency.

A person should be assigned to wait outside the building for the emergency vehicle, and to provide directions to the location of the emergency. If the building has an elevator that will be needed by the emergency response team, the elevator should be secured and waiting for the response team to use immediately upon arrival.

One or more employees should be responsible for clearing the area around the person needing medical attention. Furniture, boxes, or other office material, should be moved to allow medical personnel a clear path to the patient with sufficient room to work. Only those employees with designated responsibilities should be in the area.

If the patient is an employee, employment records should be readily available to assist medical personnel in determining any allergies or other information that may affect emergency treatment.

Fire Emergency

Advance planning is needed to properly respond during a fire emergency. Every building should have an evacuation plan, regardless of how small the location or how simple it may seem to quickly leave. All employees should understand



that their primary goal during a fire emergency is to evacuate, not to extinguish the fire.

All employees must be aware of the evacuation plan. In small buildings, one person should be designated to lead employees and others to a designated assembly area outside the building. A roll call should be taken to ensure that all persons are accounted for. In larger buildings, more than one person can be designated as responsible for specific wings, floors or sections of the building.

Anyone who may need assistance in evacuating should be identified during the planning process. Identify the individuals who will help these people evacuate, making sure that the employees who will need assistance know who will help them. Remember that if your building has an elevator, it cannot be used during a fire emergency. You may want to consider this fact when assigning office space to employees who will need emergency assistance.

Practice the evacuation plan with "fire drills." Contact your fire department and ask if the fire marshal will review your plan, observe the fire drill and offer any suggestions for improvement.

All employees should know how a building's alarm system, fire doors and fire extinguishers work, and where they are located. For new employees this training can be part of a safety orientation during their first day of work. For existing employees, at least annual training is required.

A common occurrence in many buildings with double entrance doors is to leave one of the doors locked. Double doors are a safety device to avoid bottlenecks at exits during an emergency. Be sure to unlock both doors of a double door entrance during normal business hours.

Preparing for medical or fire emergencies does not have to be a complex task. Training employees in procedures, having first aid / CPR trained personnel, posting evacuation maps, and conducting annual drills are all simple to accomplish. If you have not reviewed your emergency plan in your office and facilities in the last year, hopefully this reminder will give you a good reason to start.

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