

Are Your Staff Prepared for a Workplace Emergency?

Emergencies usually happen without notice, but if you have an emergency action plan in place and have trained workers to respond quickly and appropriately, you have a better chance of weathering the event, relieving anxiety – and potentially saving lives.

Management commitment and worker involvement are essential to an effective emergency action plan.

The action plan should be explained to workers and reviewed whenever the plan or responsibilities change.

But, how good is your emergency action plan? Does it account for different types of emergencies and set out steps employees need to take?

Find out by asking yourself and your workers the following questions:

General questions

- Is there a means of reporting emergencies and accounting for personnel before and after an incident?
- Who is the person responsible for decision-making during emergency conditions?
- Does everyone in the workplace know the procedures to follow in various emergency scenarios (e.g., fire, explosion, earthquake, chemical spill, workplace violence)?
- Do workers know the escape routes and evacuation procedures, including where to reassemble for a headcount or for further instruction?
- Do they know where emergency supplies are located?

Medical questions

- Do your employees know how to respond in the event of a medical emergency?
- Are there workers trained in cardiopulmonary resuscitation and first aid? Does the worksite have first aid equipment that corresponds to the possible injuries workers may encounter (e.g., emergency wash stations, personal protective equipment (PPE), oxygen tanks, ice packs)?
- Are emergency response phone numbers (fire department, ambulance, medical facility, etc.) clearly posted where they can be readily accessed?

Fire questions

- Does the worksite have fire extinguishers that match the possible fire hazards?
- Have workers practiced using the fire extinguishers so that they're aware of their operation and limitations?
- Have the fire extinguishers been recharged within the last year? (They must be tagged to indicate the recharge date.)

Spill questions

- Does the worksite have absorbent material that matches the quantity and type of chemicals which could spill?
- Do you have relevant PPE that would be needed to respond to a chemical spill?
- Have employees been properly trained in how to safely respond to a chemical spill?

The next step

The answers to the above questions should be in your emergency action plan and/or should be accounted for in your training and safety materials for your workers and supervisors. If your plan is silent on any of the questions, you should take the time to update it.

If you don't have an emergency action plan, you can use the questions to guide you as you create one.

Once you have established your emergency action plan, make sure employees are trained and retrained in the possible emergencies they may encounter, the emergency procedures they should follow, any first aid or rescue procedures, and in the location of emergency response equipment and phone numbers.

In an emergency, an immediate, educated response can save lives, the business operation and thousands of dollars in potential losses.

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