INTRODUCTION

It is imperative to provide direction and procedures for the development and implementation of a comprehensive emergency preparedness program in the workplace. It is essential to design strategic plans of action to be utilized in the event of an emergency to ensure the safety and well-being of all individuals and property within your enterprise. An emergency or disaster is defined as a sudden, calamitous event bringing widespread damage or suffering, loss or destruction, and great misfortune.

An emergency plan will provide established procedures and guidelines for the management and staff to follow in the event of an emergency or disaster. The following emergency plan will assist in the protection of life and property by arming workers in the facility with a definitive plan of action that reduces the unknown. Workers will be able to anticipate potential problems, determine possible solutions to emergency related problems, and make recommendations to improve the readiness of others in their facility in the event of an emergency.

IS MY COMPANY READY FOR AN EMERGENCY?

How well-prepared are you and your company to deal with an emergency situation? An action plan based on a written procedure must be ready to implement at the first indication of an emergency. All efforts should be made to ensure that the formulated emergency plan covers as many unexpected situations as possible. A plan from another enterprise can provide a foundation for your own facility; however, it is necessary to adapt their plan to address the specific needs of your own facility and workers.

Any enterprise or facility is vulnerable to some extent. Analyzing your company’s vulnerability to a particular hazard can provide the basis for developing a practical, workable emergency operations plan or checklist as well as the appropriate standard operating procedures (SOP). It is also necessary to conduct a thorough vulnerability analysis which will identify all potential hazards within your plant. Since the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, there has been considerable effort made at the federal and state levels to identify both natural hazards and man-made emergencies; however, less progress has been made at the individual level. Completing the thorough vulnerability analysis for your company will address the individual level and make it possible to formulate appropriate emergency response policies and procedures. It is essential to determine whether an emergency situation exists prior to pulling the emergency plan off the shelf and putting it in action.

Your business, regardless of what it involves, must be prepared to survive the worst possible emergency by referring to an effective, current response plan. The action plan cannot simply be a manual informing your workers on what to do or not do; instead, it must create a greater awareness of the need for readiness in the event of an emergency or catastrophe. A key element of the action plan is a total response management framework of various activities that can be executed in response to an emergency. Thus, your plan should be developed with a detailed, step-by-step training approach with response actions and staff and worker assignments. The training must be made appropriate for current and future changes within your enterprise by developing a list of alternatives for employees on sick leave or vacation. Drills should be held regularly at both opportune and inopportune times to cover any situation. During drills, everyone in the building, including
visitors and subcontractors, must obey the posted instructions when the alarm is sounded. When enacted, the site emergency response (SERP) plan will minimize devastating property losses while protecting jobs and business profits.

**SITE EMERGENCY RESPONSE PLAN**

There are many possible incidents that may effect the enterprise, both from within the boundaries of the organization and from outside. Some of these circumstances may be natural, such as severe thunderstorms, tornadoes, floods, and extreme winter weather. Many others may be man-made, including flammables, toxins, reactive gases, fire, power failures, explosions, bomb threats, hazardous materials, and terrorist acts. In order to be prepared to handle all conceivable incidents and prevent them from escalating to a disaster, a SERP with the following nine elements is recommended:

1. list of emergency numbers for company team members, fire departments, medical and rescue services, and police;

2. both primary and secondary site evaluation routes and procedures;

3. location, type, and availability of both site and community emergency equipment;

4. a plot plan of designated hazardous materials locations and operations;

5. material safety data sheets on all hazardous materials at or near the location;

6. a crisis communication plan for handling the media;

7. plan coordination, recommendation, and contacts of site and community officials and emergency responders;

8. training information, including responsibilities of site personnel; and

9. testing dates (drills) and procedures, including site exercise results and recommendations.

The SERP includes drills and tests of various program elements and response capabilities to evaluate response procedures and corrective actions. Testing approaches may include alarm tests, simulated drills, and mock exercises with community groups. Evaluation results and the proposed/actual corrective actions must be documented and incorporated into the emergency response plan. Involving community agencies in the testing process enhances community relations while improving the plan itself. Community involvement can also lead to improved training opportunities such as mutual aid.

Each type of potential emergency has a different impact. Before deciding whether or not your enterprise is adequately prepared for various types of emergencies, it is imperative to perform a vulnerability analysis of your facility. This will determine the probability and the potential impact of the different types of emergencies. When completing the vulnerability analysis, it is important to remember history and evaluate past emergencies.

**VULNERABILITY ANALYSIS**

The vulnerability analysis will help determine the extent of what may be to come. With respect to a particular hazard, the vulnerability analysis can provide the basis for developing a practical, feasible emergency operations plan or checklist along with the appropriate SOP. A local vulnerability analysis or hazard identification should be a matter of record at the municipal or county level emergency management organization. Environmental, indigenous, and economic factors must be considered when assessing and analyzing the vulnerability of individual facilities. An historical approach that evaluates community emergencies from the past few decades will provide invaluable information regarding potential emergencies that may occur in your area or facility.

For planning purposes, you must assume that the majority of emergencies will arrive with very little warning, rapid onset, and the potential for substantial destruction. Although the likelihood that a natural or
man-made emergency strikes your enterprise may be very small, you must have the capability to react to, cope with, and recover from any emergency situation that could conceivably occur at your location.

**PRESERVATION OF RECORDS**

Preservation and protection of vital records in an emergency situation is essential for a quick return to normal operations. Destruction, disruption, or loss of records can significantly delay recovery operations. To ensure that records deemed essential for the continuity of business are properly safeguarded, the following steps are recommended:

- Identify priority categories for essential records.
- Label records with identifiable markings. Evacuation priority should be noted on record containers.
- Evaluate alternate storage locations for records, depending on hazard analysis.
- Make arrangements for transportation to relocate records to alternate locations, if necessary.
- Identify and retain copies of records that will be needed during emergency operations by management or emergency response teams.

**SELECTING RECORDS TO BE PROTECTED**

The vital information protection program is an administrative tool for safeguarding essential records. Management begins by systematically determining what information is vital and which records contain this information. The vital records protection program must be tested and evaluated at least once a year to identify any potential problems. The test should verify that the vital records needed after an emergency are current, protected against hazards, and retrievable as needed.

**EMERGENCY RESPONSE TRAINING**

Training is an essential part of most activities within any enterprise. This is especially true when it comes to an emergency response and your action plan. Workers must be trained to handle emergency situations within their workplace. Proper emergency response training will prove to be a valuable asset to the company as well as to the employees, should the need ever arise. Such training may include company team members as well as emergency responders from the community. Employee emergency response training should include the following:

- power disconnects;
- use of fire extinguishers;
- search and rescue techniques;
- emergency response policies and procedures; and
- emergency first aid and medical treatment.

**EVACUATION PROCEDURES**

On-site emergency response evacuation planning ensures that all facility personnel understand the emergency action plan and general evacuation procedures for their location. Once the emergency alarm sounds, every employee must know the following evacuation procedures:

- All personnel must know the proper predetermined evacuation route to take.
All personnel must know assemblage and check-in point locations for meeting once outside.

All facility personnel must assist visitors, members of the public, and subcontractors from the premises. Visitors will remain with the staff.

Don't put your work away.

Don't use elevators.

Don't stop to gather your belongings.

Don't stop to inquire if it is a false alarm.

Departmental emergency coordinator or designee will take a roll call.

The emergency coordinator will report any employees who may still be inside the building.

Department searchers will check the building for workers who failed to hear the alarm. Searchers will operate in teams of two members.

Each department will stay assembled until further instructions.

In the event that immediate assistance from the community resources is not available, you may need to develop additional resources, acquire additional equipment, conduct more training, and establish mutual aid agreements with other nearby enterprises. Other organizations and agencies that might be willing to assist include:

- the office of emergency management;
- utility companies;
- medical centers and local hospitals;
- municipal, county, and state police;
- emergency medical services (EMS);
- insurance carriers;
- hazardous incident response teams if available; and
- contractors.

Developing a generic plan is a start; however, a basic emergency response plan is required to cover special provisions for the most threatening types of emergencies. A written emergency action plan containing specific elements is required by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) for all employers. A well-formulated and developed emergency response plan teaches employees the following:

- how to report an emergency;
- how to activate and recognize the alarm or warning system;
- check-in and rescue procedures; and
- assigned tasks and responsibilities.

**SIMULATED DRILLS, TESTING, AND EVALUATING**

The key to any successful emergency response plan is to hold drills regularly to evaluate the responses of your employees. Practice before an emergency arises helps to prevent panic and confusion when confronted with a true emergency; thus, drills are the ultimate test for determining emergency preparedness. All drills should be designed with the intended goal of uncovering any weaknesses in the plan and to ensure that everyone effectively follows the emergency plan. Drills should cover most conceivable situations and clearly establish detailed procedures for accomplishing complete or partial evacuations from the building.

Evaluating drills not only provide a strong emergency response but also lay the foundation for a successful safety program. Evaluation results and
the proposed or actual corrective actions must be documented and incorporated into the plan. Involving community agencies in the actual testing process enhances community relations while strengthening the plan. Working closely with other agencies can also lead to improved training opportunities.

**CONCLUSION**

The key to controlling an emergency response situation is a well-conceived and developed program. Action plans should be designed to ensure the safety and well-being of individuals and property in the event of an emergency. In summary, the major elements that must be included in any emergency response preparedness plan are the following:

- communications;
- evacuation procedures;
- company assessment;
- natural emergencies and disasters;
- man-made emergencies;
- consideration for emergency operations; and
- emergency/disaster recovery.

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**RECOMMENDED READING**


