

## Chapter 10 - Be Prepared for Emergencies

### Suggested Activities

- **Show** map of emergency evacuation routes - if possible, use as an overhead
- **Distribute** copies of the company's written emergency action plan, asking employees how it might affect them.
- **Distribute** handouts with emergency numbers, or have workers fill them in as you talk.

For additional information, refer to the **Background** text below.

### Background

Few things in life are as frightening as a shout of "Fire!" or the sound of an emergency alarm or siren. Your whole body freezes for a few seconds, while your mind races frantically to decide how to respond. If you don't know how to respond quickly and safely, the consequences could be tragic.

In many workplaces, the sound of an emergency alarm might mean any of several potentially dangerous situations, particularly if hazardous chemicals are involved. It could mean a serious spill of hazardous liquids or release of toxic fumes. Even a relatively small fire could lead to a major disaster if it causes an explosion by igniting flammable chemicals.

As a supervisor, you have a special responsibility in preparing for a fire or other emergency. You need to make sure that workers understand exactly what to do when an emergency occurs. And that, in turn, means giving them proper and effective training in emergency response.

### Recognizing Potential Hazards

As with most safety-related issues, the best way to be prepared for emergencies is to prevent them in the first place. Every worker should be trained to recognize situations and circumstances that could cause a fire, explosion, or other emergency—and to use proper safety precautions.

A good place to start is the information on potential hazards and emergency procedures on the container labels and material safety data sheets (MSDSs) that accompany hazardous chemicals. This information tells whether a chemical is flammable, or reactive, or if a major spill or release could be toxic.

Knowing how to read and understand labels and MSDSs is part of required worker training under OSHA's Hazard Communication Standard (29 CFR Part 1910.1200). Workers should be trained to understand, for example, that a fire or explosion could result if a flammable chemical comes into contact with an accidental spark—and they should know how to take appropriate precautions to avoid such accidents, as required in the company fire prevention plan.

Other examples of precautions that can prevent emergencies include:

- Checking electrical equipment to make sure it is in good condition. Faulty electrical equipment is the number one cause of fires in the workplace!
- Enforcement of an absolute ban on smoking wherever "No Smoking" signs are posted, or around flammable chemicals.
- Prohibiting careless use of hand tools or other metal objects that could cause sparks if struck or dropped.
- Prompt cleanup and proper disposal of small spills of flammable liquids.

## **Heroes Not Wanted**

Except in unusual circumstances, emergency preparedness does not mean that supervisors and workers are expected to deal directly with a fire, chemical release, or other serious emergency. This type of work is best left to professionals or employees with special training in emergency response. Well-meaning attempts by untrained, unequipped individuals to fight a major fire or stop a major chemical release can often make a bad situation worse.

One example of this is an electrical fire. While water can be used to put out some fires, it can be downright deadly if thrown onto an electrical fire since it conducts electricity. Unless people are able to recognize an electrical fire and know exactly what to use to put it out, they shouldn't even try.

If employees aren't supposed to "be heroes," then what should they do? In most cases, the proper response boils down to two basic actions:

1. Turning in the alarm.
2. Leaving the area of the emergency in an orderly fashion.

Along with specific company response procedures, be sure all employees know about these key emergency issues:

- Reporting an emergency—Employees should know the locations of alarms and emergency telephones in the workplace, including numbers and names of people to call. They should understand the importance of fast action in alerting response personnel and fellow workers.
- Shutting down operations or systems—Employees should know if certain operations or systems should be shut down to prevent a fire from spreading, avoid an explosion, or otherwise make a bad situation worse.

- Using fire extinguishers—For small fires, quick response with a fire extinguisher may be the most appropriate action. Employees should know where fire extinguishers are located and how to use them.
- Following evacuation procedures—Employees should know the locations of all emergency exits, the proper evacuation routes to take, and a designated location in which to gather in an emergency so that all personnel can be accounted for.
- Remaining calm—Panic is the leading enemy of effective emergency response. Workers must understand the importance of staying calm in an emergency and following emergency response rules to the letter.

## Getting the Message Across

In addition to safety training sessions, practices such as fire drills are vital to effective emergency response. Training should cover the individual workplace's various types of potential emergencies, such as fires, explosions, chemical spills or releases, etc. During Hazard Communication Standard ("Right-to-Know") training, employees should learn how to find information about the substances they handle—and how to use that information to help prevent emergencies.

OSHA recognizes the importance of emergency preparedness by requiring companies to have emergency exits, response equipment, written emergency plans, and information for employees about potentially hazardous substances. But being prepared in an emergency isn't just for the sake of complying with OSHA regulations—preparedness can prevent serious injury, save lives, and keep small disasters from becoming massive tragedies.

## Emergency Preparedness Checklist

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>To PREVENT emergencies, do all employees:</b>		
Check MSDSs and container labels regarding potential dangers of fire, explosion, toxic fumes, or other emergencies?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Understand the information on MSDSs and container labels about emergency procedures?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Strictly obey "No Smoking" rules?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Recognize faulty or damaged electrical equipment, and know not to use it?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Understand the danger of accidental sparks from metal objects near flammable substances?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Promptly clean up small spills of flammable substances?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>If, they must RESPOND to emergencies, do all employees:</b>		
Know the locations of the nearest emergency alarms and telephones?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- Know how to use emergency alarms and telephones?
- Know how to shut down operations or systems in an emergency?
- Know the locations of fire extinguishers and how to use them?
- Know the locations of emergency exits, evacuation routes, and designated gathering places?
- Understand the importance of staying calm and following emergency procedures exactly?