EMERGENCY ACTION PLANS

In the event of fire, severe weather, medical emergencies, gas leaks and other emergencies, employers must have procedures to evacuate personnel quickly and safely. OSHA requires organizations with more than 10 employees to have a written emergency action plan that must be communicated to all employees.

If an emergency action plan is already in place, the organization must ensure that the plan includes specific procedures for employees at all locations, including those off site.

Emergency action plans must include the following procedures for all potential emergencies:

- Procedures for reporting a fire or other emergency
- Procedures for emergency evacuation or sheltering
- Procedures for employees who remain to perform critical operations before they evacuate
- Procedures to account for all employees after evacuation
- Procedures for employees performing rescue or medical duties.

DEVELOPING AN EMERGENCY ACTION PLAN

As a result of these requirements, creating an emergency action plan for an organization requires input from a variety of departments.

Establish gathering points after an evacuation or other emergency.

Other departments or offices, such as law enforcement, also have their own plans for locations such as jails. In many of these cases, facility/maintenance staff should be involved in the creation of the plan or be aware of any of their responsibilities under the plan.

Best Practices

Some best practices and considerations for emergency action plans include:

- Methods to notify proper authorities (fire, rescue, etc.). Consider methods to provide alerts for events, such as fires, that provide automatic notification to emergency responders to help prevent damage during nonbusiness hours, e.g., a fire occurs on a weekend or in a location where people are rarely present.
- Notification for employees when an emergency occurs. This can be as simple as audible alarms with visual cues or other means. Mass notification systems, such as "code red", can help alert employees in the field or off site, while audible and visual alarms are helpful for those with sensory impairments, such as blindness or deafness.
- Notification of tenants and the public. With some emergencies, such as fires or severe weather, alarms or sirens are commonly used. However, for medical emergencies, security threats or other emergencies,

there may need to be another system to alert people of hazards. Some popular means include using a public address system and designated code words, call and contact trees and word of mouth to those nearby.

- Maintaining a clear list of responsibilities for those who authorize and coordinate emergency actions. Designated people should be responsible for declaring an evacuation or to take shelter, and others to coordinate the response to ensure people go to the correct areas.
  - Establishing a chain of command ahead of time is helpful in these situations to avoid confusion during an emergency.
- Identifying shelter locations, if available, prior to any events, particularly for severe weather.
- Developing emergency procedures with regards to evacuation or moving to a shelter, which may include rules to discourage running, leaving belongings behind, locking computers before leaving the desk and other best practices to help avoid potential injury.
- Determining exit routes for all locations within the facility. Give special attention to maintaining unobstructed paths for egress. For more information about exit routes, see Chapter 16.
- Meeting locations are vital when trying to account for everyone from a particular area. Meeting locations should be a safe distance from the facility and not hinder roadways or routes for first responders.
  - Secondary points may be required if primary meeting locations are unavailable.
- Assigning individuals responsible for conducting a head count at the evacuation gathering site. Consider maintaining a copy of the staff schedule that can be referenced at an evacuation site to determine if anyone missing may be still inside the facility. Staff contact numbers may also be prudent to maintain to attempt to reach those who may not be at the evacuation location.
- Methods and instructions to assist those with special needs or visitors/contractors during an evacuation. This may include directing individuals to designated areas of refuge.
- Identifying utilities and other equipment requiring shutdown or protection during an emergency. The locations of these utilities and who is responsible for shutdown are commonly added to emergency action plans.
- Establishing contact numbers for outside agencies, such as hospitals, fire stations or other first responders, to be called to provide emergency assistance.

- Identifying the location of emergency safety devices, such as first-aid kits, fire extinguishers, automatic external defibrillators (AEDs), emergency eyewash stations or other equipment. These locations are often listed on emergency action plans, making it easy for employees to find them. Conveying emergency action plans to employees upon orientation and repeated whenever the plan changes or when an employee's responsibility under the plan changes.

- The name and job title of the employee(s) who may be contacted if other employees need more information or explanation concerning procedures or duties under the program.

- Updating the plans when responsibilities change, procedures change or if remodeling changes parts of the egress.

MULTIPLE EMERGENCY ACTION PLANS WITHIN THE SAME FACILITY

As OSHA requires employers to create emergency action plans, many of the tenants within any given facility may have their own emergency action plans. This can cause some problems if the plans conflict, or each instructs employees or visitors to the same shelter area, which then lacks capacity.

Other issues can emerge with regard to communication or reporting emergency situations. Plans often include guidance to alert employees and emergency personnel, but may fail to alert those within the same facility. It is important to be aware of any potential shortcomings with multiple emergency action plans within the same facility. To this end, it is a good idea to invite tenants when conducting drills or practices. This helps identify problems with each other's plans.

EMERGENCY GENERATORS

In the event of a power outage, it is important that equipped emergency generators are well-maintained and ready to run. Facility managers should follow manufacturer guidelines and instruction manual recommendations to keep the equipment functioning.

Emergency generator

It is important that facility managers maintain at least two copies of the manuals both near the machine and elsewhere to refer to and become familiar with them.

Any special tools or testing devices, as well as any personal protective equipment, such as hearing protection, required for routine maintenance should also be present to be used if needed.

Any maintenance or testing work should be documented to serve both as a record and as a tool to help identify problems. For further information, see "Inspection and Testing of Emergency Generators" from the Minnesota Department of Health.

Further safety rules and regulations regarding emergency action plans can be primarily found in OSHA Standard 29 CFR1910.38, Emergency Action Plans.

EMERGENCY ACTION PLAN CHECKUP

ITEM	YES	NO	ACTION ITEM
Is a written emergency action plan available, detailing all procedures for all sites and employees?			
Is the emergency action plan available to employees to review?			
Are all employees trained on the emergency action plan and retrained when the plan changes or their responsibilities under the plan change?			
Do all agencies or tenants within the facility have emergency action plans that do not conflict with the plans of the owner of the facility?			
Are methods in place to inform employees, tenants and the public about emergencies?			
Are all emergency generators within the facility maintained according to manufacturer guidelines, and are these maintenance or repair records documented?			
Does each employee know his or her designated gathering area and secondary area if denoted?			