

Loss Control Bulletin #49

OSHA regulations require every employer to have an Emergency Preparedness Plan specifically designed for each workplace. The Plan needs to be comprehensive in addressing the variety of threat and emergency situations that can arise in the workplace. Such emergencies may include: fire, earthquake, flooding, tornado, bomb threat, hazardous material release, radiological or biological releases, civil disturbances, and workplace violence. The Plan should include appropriate responses for each type of emergency. A clear chain of command should be established and communicated to all employees to assure that correct instructions will be followed in an emergency.

The Plan must be designed to protect both employees and any visitors on the premises at the time of the emergency. It also must include provisions to address the special needs of the disabled. The basic elements of any plan must include an alarm system, diagram of evacuation routes, emergency lighting, and employee training.

Alarm System – The alarm system requirements will depend largely on the size and configuration of the building occupied by the business. It must be adequate to audibly and visually alert all building occupants of an emergency requiring evacuation of the building. Local building or Life Safety Code requirements will generally govern the type and installation specifications.

Evacuation Routes – Floor diagrams that clearly indicate the path to the nearest exits should be posted throughout the premises. The diagrams should also indicate the locations of fire extinguishers, first aid kits, spill cleanup kits, alarm boxes, and designated areas where employees should assemble. Exits must be clearly indicated and kept clear at all times.

Emergency Lighting – Emergency lighting must be installed throughout the building per Building or Life Safety Code requirements.

Employee Training - Employers must provide employees training in:

- Appropriate circumstances for use of alarm systems
- Proper method for setting off alarm systems
- Alerting the local civil authorities
- The duties and responsibilities of floor wardens
- Conditions necessitating building evacuation
- Conditions when shelter-in-place is the most desirable option
- Specific evacuation procedures to follow
- Evacuation routes to follow
- Assisting visitors and individuals with special needs to safety
- Where to assemble after evacuating the building
- Accounting for all employees including any visitors who were in the building at the time of the emergency
- When it is safe and permissible to re-enter the building
- Proper selection and use of fire extinguishers
- Not using elevators during an emergency

In order to make sure that an Emergency Preparedness Plan is effective in an emergency, practice drills should be conducted semi-annually. Following each drill, a written evaluation of the drill should be prepared and discussed with the staff. Weaknesses or flaws in the Plan observed during the drill should be immediately corrected.

Copies of your Emergency Preparedness Plan should be provided to all employees. A copy of the Plan should be posted on

an employee bulletin board, accessible to everyone. Your plan should also be coordinated with your local police and fire department.

To help in the preparation of an Emergency Preparedness Plan, just follow the links to these websites.

<http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/etools/evacuation/index.html>

http://www.ready.gov/stay_or_go.html

http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/etools/evacuation/docs/eap_checklist.pdf

The guidelines provided in this bulletin are only intended to provide an overview of some of the more important steps that can be taken by management to establish a safe workplace. The guidelines are not considered exhaustive of all measures and controls that can be implemented by management to address all potential loss or injury producing causes. Ultimately it is the responsibility of management to take the necessary steps to provide for employee and customer safety.