

## SAFETY BRIEF: **WORKPLACE EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS & RESPONSE**

Emergencies and disasters occur when we least expect them, anytime and anywhere with the potential to cause injuries and illnesses. In the workplace, employers and employees may be required to handle an emergency when it is least expected. Having proper planning set up before emergencies occur helps everyone respond effectively and appropriately, and can decrease the likelihood of injuries and illnesses.

### **What is a workplace emergency?**

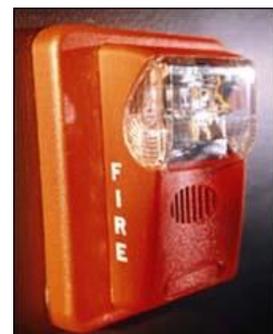
A workplace emergency is an unplanned event that threatens workers, customers, or the public; disrupts or shuts down operations; or causes physical or environmental damage. Emergencies can be natural or man-made including; earthquakes, floods, fires, wildfires, tsunamis, winter weather, chemical spills or releases, disease outbreaks, workplace violence resulting in bodily harm or trauma, or explosions involving nuclear or radiological sources. These are a few examples of the many types of workplace emergencies. During the planning process many emergencies can be anticipated, which helps employers and workers plan for other unpredictable situations. Employers facilitate and organize employer and worker actions during workplace emergencies through Emergency Action Plans (EAPs).

### **What is an Emergency Action Plan?**

An emergency action plan is a written document with detailed instructions that outlines what the employer and workers need to do during specific workplace emergencies. A well designed emergency plan along with proper employee training (such that employees understand their roles and responsibilities during an emergency) results in fewer and less severe employee injuries and less structural damage to the facility during emergencies. A poorly prepared plan can lead to a disorganized evacuation or emergency response, resulting in confusion, injury, illness, and/or property damage.

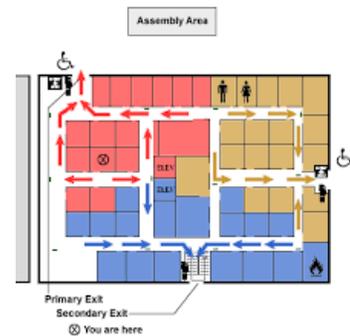
### **EAP's must include the following:**

1. Procedures for reporting fires and other emergencies
  - All employees must know how to report emergencies. This could include dialing 911, pulling a manual fire alarm, or using an intercom or public address system to notify other employees. Make sure these alarms are distinctive and recognized by all employees as a signal to evacuate the work area. Alarms must be able to be heard, seen, or otherwise perceived by everyone in the workplace including those who may be blind or deaf. The alarm must be recognized above ambient noise and light levels, and might include horn blasts or sirens. Consider providing an auxiliary power supply to your alarm system in the event of an electrical failure. A public address system is also a good idea for broadcasting emergency information to all employees- even those who may not be on the worksite.



## 2. Procedures of evacuations

- Evacuation policies, procedures and emergency escape route assignments are used so that employees understand who is authorized to order an evacuation, when an evacuation is necessary, how to evacuate, and what exit routes to take. Some evacuation procedures may include closing windows and doors and turning off equipment. Exit routes are generally diagrams used to identify escape routes to be followed by employees and visitors in each facility. These exit route diagrams are typically posted at the entrance and additionally throughout the building at separate rooms or classrooms. A disorganized evacuation can result in confusion, injury, and property damage. It's also important to remember that an exit route is a continuous and unobstructed path of exit travel from any point within a workplace to a place of safety.



- ## 3. Procedures for employees who remain to operate critical plant operations before they evacuate
- Employees may be required to operate fire extinguishers or shut down gas and/or electrical systems and other special equipment that could be damaged if left operating or create additional hazards to emergency responders. Sometimes it may not be practical or even possible to shut down equipment or processes immediately (such as releasing hazardous materials). The preferred approach, and the one most often used by small businesses, is immediate evacuation of all employees when the evacuation alarm is sounded. If employees must stay behind, the EAP must describe in detail the procedures to be followed by these employees. Employees who stay behind must also be capable of recognizing when to abandon the operation or task and evacuate themselves safely before it's too late.

## 4. Procedures to account for all employees after an emergency evacuation

- This ensures that everyone in the building got out safely. Procedures may include designating employees to "sweep" areas- checking offices and rest rooms before being the last person to leave the workplace, or conducting a roll call in a set meeting place- called "muster point" or "assembly area." Assembly areas should be located both inside and outside your workplace, where employees gather after evacuating. Make sure that your assembly areas have enough space for all employees. Assembly areas located outside are typically located in parking lots or open areas up-wind from the building for protection from prevailing wind direction. Accounting for all employees after an evacuation is critical. Confusion in assembly areas can lead to delays in rescuing anyone trapped in the building, or unnecessary and dangerous search-and-rescue operations. Many employers designate an "evacuation warden" to assist others during an evacuation and to account for all personnel.



5. Procedures for employees who perform rescue and medical duties

- It's normal to want to help someone in an emergency, however untrained workers may endanger themselves and those they are trying to rescue. For this reason, it's important to leave rescue work to those who are trained, equipped, and certified to conduct rescues. If your company does not have a formal medical program, you may consider ways to provide medical and first-aid services. Most small businesses rely on public resources such as the local fire and police departments, medical clinics or hospitals, and ambulance services to provide rescue and medical duties. If a clinic or hospital is not close to your workplace, ensure that onsite person(s) have adequate training in first aid, CPR, and AED.



6. Procedures to contact employees

- In the event of an emergency, it's important to have immediate access to employee contact information. This includes their names, job titles, departments, and telephone numbers. You should consider adding telephone numbers of their next of kin, and medical information.

**Do I need an Emergency Action Plan (EAP)?**

Per the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), businesses that are required to, or provide fire extinguishers in the workplace, and if anyone evacuates during a fire or other emergency, requires an EAP. The only exclusion is businesses that have an in-house fire brigade in which every employee is trained and equipped to fight fires, and no one evacuates. For smaller organizations, the EAP does not need to be written and may be communicated verbally if there are 10 or fewer employees (29 CFR 1910.38(b)). Most organizations find it beneficial to include management and employees in the planning process and to meet regularly to review progress, incorporate changes, and develop assigned tasks. The commitment and support of all employees is critical to the plan's success in the event of an emergency.

Additional training is available through the AMLJIA Online University at [www.amljia.org](http://www.amljia.org). Log on to the Online University for courses related on this topic such as "Emergency Communication in the Workplace," and "Safety Awareness Program for Supervisors." For more information about the Online University, contact the AMLJIA at 800-337-3682.