

Expecting the Unexpected

The tragic events of September 2001 unfortunately made the need for emergency planning painfully clear. While disasters such as terrorism, aircraft collision and structure collapse certainly qualify as emergencies, the same is true for unexpected facility crises such as fires, explosions, hazardous materials releases, and false alarms. These events can wreak havoc on a facility and its operations, thus making the need for a comprehensive emergency plan a reality.

Why have an emergency plan?

Under 29 CFR 1910.38, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) requires a written plan for facilities with more than 10 employees. Several local, state and federal regulatory agencies require them as well. There are many additional reasons for any facility to have a solid emergency plan in place. Large facilities may have larger risks; small facilities may not be able to afford any excess losses. Being proactive rather than reactive will reduce liability, cut costs, improve credibility, and will make a facility manager's most important asset - employees - feel safe and valuable.

What exactly is an emergency plan?

An emergency plan decreases the probability of an emergency taking place through prevention, early detection, notification, evacuation or relocation, control or mitigation, and recuperation. The main objective of an emergency plan should be to save human lives, followed by

the actual structure, its operations and contents. At a minimum, all plans should contain the following basic elements:

- >Emergency escape procedures and routes
- >Procedures for facility security and shutdown of critical facility operations
- >Procedures to ensure employee head counts and reporting casualties or missing persons
- >Rescue and medical procedures
- >Procedures to report fires and other emergencies
- >Names and job titles of employees to contact for more information
- >Information on alarm systems
- >Training for safe and orderly evacuation

These elements are only sufficient for a basic framework. Variable factors include building size, location, number of employees, type of operations, hazards, applicable regulations, and likely emergencies. It is therefore important to avoid the urge to implement a "one-size-fits-all" plan. Create a plan tailored specifically to your facility. Keep it concise and easily understandable, and don't forget to include procedures for employees with disabilities, contractor operations, and the public. Educate employees on the plan as soon as it is developed, if employee responsibilities change, and if the plan itself changes.

Will it actually work?

Of course! An emergency plan will be most effective if:

- >It gets tested and updated
- >It is well-designed and tailored to your facility
- >All employees are well-trained and the plan has been practiced
- >Your facility is properly maintained (exit doors are unobstructed, hazardous materials are properly labeled and stored, critical operations are addressed)
- >Nobody panics

Aside from the "it could never happen here" attitude, a major reason facility managers tend to avoid implementing a written or clearly defined plan is that they believe it will evolve into a shelf-dwelling, dust-collecting, cumbersome and costly document. Not true! Once a solid emergency plan is in place, it will always be simple to maintain.

Environmental Compliance Services, Inc. (ECS) has been providing facility management and training for several years, and we have worked with numerous facility managers and their staffs to develop site-specific, affordable written emergency plans. Our team also provides a full spectrum of on-site training programs including Hazardous Waste Operations and Emergency Response, US DOT Hazardous Materials Training, RCRA Hazardous Waste Training, OSHA General Outreach Training, the Control of Hazardous Energy, and Lockout/Tagout.

For more information, please call (800) 789-3530 or visit our website at www.ecsconsult.com.