5 Steps to Emergency Preparedness



Emergencies can happen at any time, wreaking havoc and devastation and taking a costly toll on the lives of workers and on the finances of business and industry. Your workers play a key role in the execution of your company's emergency preparedness plan. And since September 2008 marks the fifth annual National Preparedness Month in the United States, it's a good time to review the topic of emergency preparedness with your workers.

5 Steps to Emergency Preparedness

It's often said that the best defense is a good offense, and when it comes to emergency preparedness, the best strategy is to Prepare and Plan to safely Respond. Here's how.

Step 1: Evaluate Your Existing Plans

Your first step is to review and re-evaluate your company's emergency response plan, making sure that plans are in place for all possible types of emergencies. These can include, but aren't limited to:

- Fires and explosions;
- Hazardous material incidents and chemical spills;
- Hurricanes, earthquakes, tornadoes, floods, lightning and winter storms;
- Infectious disease outbreaks and pandemics;
- Terrorist attacks, biological agents (bioterrorism), civil disturbances, bomb threats and workplace violence;
- Power outages;
- Vehicle or aircraft incidents;
- Structural collapses.

Step 2: Train Your Workers

Your next step is to review your company's emergency response procedures and policies with workers. Ensure that all employees (including new and returning workers) have received orientation and training in these areas:

- Their specific roles and responsibilities in your company's emergency response procedures;
- The potential hazards, threats and protective actions specific to your

workplace;
- Your company’s established communication procedures, including notifications and warnings;
- Your company’s evacuation and shelter procedures;
- The location of common emergency equipment and how to use this equipment;
- The emergency shutdown procedures; and
- Established home communication plans for workers to contact and locate family members during an emergency.

Step 3: Communicate Your Plans and Procedures

Once everyone has received proper training, it’s important to keep workers up to date and involved in your company’s emergency planning. Use internal communications tools such as handouts, posters, newsletters and intranets to keep workers informed of emergency plans and procedures.

Step 4: Practice

It’s also important to practice your emergency response plan. Schedule regular drills and exercises for all potential situations to help keep your workers prepared for the unexpected.

Step 5: Drive the Message Home

Of course, emergencies also occur in the home and the community. Stress to your workers the importance of developing and testing family and individual emergency preparedness plans.

Conclusion

During an emergency or crisis, the biggest risk to your workers in the workplace is the confusion and panic resulting from being unprepared. If you keep workers informed, educated, trained and practiced, they will be able to respond to a crisis in a more self-assured, confident manner.