Yes, it Can Happen Here



Safety Talk

If you have never experienced a serious emergency in your workplace, you might find it hard to imagine such a thing could happen. However, every day in job settings just like yours, something goes seriously wrong.

It could be a fire, fatal injury, flood, earthquake, shooting, tornado, chemical spill or another kind of crisis.

Whether everyone survives and escapes injury depends on how well they are prepared for an emergency.

How about you? Are you prepared to survive a workplace emergency? You should be receiving regular training and practice in dealing with the types of emergencies most likely to occur where you work.

The first survival tool is knowledge. You need to know what can go wrong. Are hazardous chemicals stored or transported near your workplace? Is your workplace an essential service or a high-profile setting that could be targeted by terrorists? Are you located in a tornado zone or a natural floodplain?

Second, you must know how to get out of the building and reach safety. Right now, can you point out two exits from your work area? Elevators don’t count because you should not use them in an emergency such as a fire. Do you know where you are to assemble with your fellow workers after an evacuation of the building? This is an important aspect of the emergency procedure, because if you do not show up there, an emergency crew might have to risk injury looking for you. Evacuation procedures can be summed up as follows: Get out, go to a safe place and stay there.

Third, do you know what other duties you are expected to perform in an emergency? You need to know how to call for help. Emergency phone numbers should be posted at each telephone in your workplace, along with the address and directions to your work area. Your responsibilities might include checking for stragglers and shutting doors as you leave, or assisting a fellow worker who uses a wheelchair.

You also might be assigned responsibility for shutting down equipment or

chemical processes in an emergency. If you are supposed to fight fire, clean up hazardous chemicals or rescue victims, you will need special training and equipment.

The time to learn about these emergency procedures is now, not after something goes wrong. Your company has developed a plan for the kinds of emergencies that can be reasonably expected. You need to find out your own part in the plan, learn how to do it and practice it. Also make sure you find out who is in charge in an emergency. Should you be listening to your supervisor or a security employee?

You should also be familiar with the various alarm sounds and lights in your workplace. Alarm systems typically have different signals for fire and intruder emergencies. There may also be specific alarms related to hazardous equipment, chemicals, gases and other hazards.

Do your best to plan for the worst. That’s the basis of emergency preparedness.