

Loss Control Services – 5 Minute Safety Topic

Be Prepared for Emergencies – A B C

A. Always Be Responsible

Few things in life are as frightening as a shout of "Fire!" or the sound of an emergency alarm or siren. Your whole body freezes for a few seconds, while your mind races frantically to decide how to respond. If you don't know how to respond quickly and safely, the consequences could be tragic. Everyone has a special responsibility in preparing for a fire or other emergency. We need to make sure that we understand exactly what to do when an emergency occurs.

B. Be On the Lookout for Potential Hazards

As with most safety-related issues, the best way to be prepared for emergencies is to prevent them in the first place. Every employee should be trained to recognize situations and circumstances that could cause a fire, explosion, or other emergency—and to use proper safety precautions. A good place to start is the information on potential hazards and emergency procedures on the container labels and material safety data sheets (MSDSs) that accompany hazardous chemicals. This information tells whether a chemical is flammable, or reactive, or if a major spill or release could be toxic.

Other examples of precautions that can prevent emergencies include:

- Checking electrical equipment to make sure it is in good condition. Faulty electrical equipment is the number one cause of fires in the workplace!
- Enforcement of an absolute ban on smoking wherever "No Smoking" signs are posted.
- Prohibiting careless use of hand tools or other metal objects that could cause sparks.
- Prompt cleanup and proper disposal of small spills of flammable liquids.

C. Check What You Need To Know

Except in unusual circumstances, emergency preparedness does not mean that supervisors and employees are expected to deal directly with a fire, chemical release, or other serious emergency. This type of work is best left to professionals or employees with special training in emergency response. Well-meaning attempts by untrained, unequipped individuals to fight a major fire or stop a major chemical release can often make a bad situation worse. One example of this is an electrical fire. While water can be used to put out some fires, it can be downright deadly if thrown onto an electrical fire since it conducts electricity. Unless people are able to recognize an electrical fire and know exactly what to use to put it out, they shouldn't even try. If employees aren't supposed to "be heroes," then what should they do? In most cases, the proper response boils down to two basic actions:

1. Turning in the alarm. 2. Leaving the area of the emergency in an orderly fashion.

Alarms: Employees should know the locations of alarms and emergency telephones in the workplace, including numbers and names of people to call. They should understand the importance of fast action in alerting response personnel and fellow workers.

Exits: Following evacuation procedures—Employees should know the locations of all emergency exits, the proper evacuation routes to take, and a designated location in which to gather in an emergency so that all personnel can be accounted for.

Remaining calm: Panic is the leading enemy of effective emergency response. Workers must understand the importance of staying calm in an emergency and following emergency response rules to the letter.

Communication: Getting the message cross to everyone requires best practices such as fire drills and training to cover the individual workplace's various types of potential emergencies. Being prepared in an emergency isn't just for the sake of complying with OSHA regulations—preparedness can prevent serious injury, save lives, and keep small disasters from becoming massive tragedies.