

RiskTopics

Emergency preparedness – Small construction sites

Zurich Resilience Solutions - Risk Engineering

Instituting a plan with actions specific to a job site is a critical part of emergency preparedness.

Introduction

Protecting workers and the public from possible emergencies and disasters requires the careful develop of an emergency action plan which clearly identifies the steps to follow when immediate action is necessary. Planning in advance helps ensure that everyone knows what to do when an emergency occurs.

Discussion

Emergencies can present any number of hazards for jobsites. Impacts can be to workers, property, and the public. An emergency action plan enables your company to react quickly in the event of an emergency. The emergency action plan defines the procedures and response to a severe event.

According to OSHA (n.d.), a workplace emergency is defined as:

a situation that threatens workers, customers, or the public; disrupts or shuts down operations; or causes physical or environmental damage. Emergencies may be natural or man-made, and may include hurricanes, tornadoes, earthquakes, floods, wildfires, winter weather, chemical spills or releases, disease outbreaks, releases of biological agents, explosions involving nuclear or radiological sources, and many other hazards.

The best plans are integrated into the way you run your business. The closer the emergency plan aligns with established roles and day to day processes, the easier it will be to implement. If a plan is not integrated, it will likely not be used by teams at the time of the crisis, or the staff will forget a plan even if it exists. The success of the plan does not depend on how well it is written, but how well it is implemented and practiced which requires the plan to be easy to follow. The plan can't just be a piece of paper in a binder on a shelf or in a file, it should be well thought out, communicated, and practiced. Staff members need be trained regarding their assigned roles, if any, and what is expected of them when called to evacuate an area.

It is a common inspection practice for OSHA compliance officers review emergency action plans during inspections. The plan should be easily accessible to anyone on the jobsite. If OSHA asks, workers should be able to identify:

- 1) Where the plan is located at the jobsite;
- 2) The basic steps of evacuation and where the assembly area is located;
- 3) What emergencies are covered by the plan; and
- 4) What role they will play, if any.

Guidance

Start by conducting a hazard assessment to determine the potential hazards from inside or outside the worksite.

In general, the emergency preparedness plan should be designed to address (if applicable) the following:

- Bomb threats
- Civil disturbances
- Crane failures
- Cyber-attacks
- Evacuations
- Fire/explosion emergencies
- Leakage of hazardous substances
- Loss of power including shut down procedures
- Medical emergencies
- Radiation emergencies
- Severe weather emergencies including earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, lightening, tornados, wildfires, high-winds, and winter weather
- Structural failures
- Uncontrolled chemical reaction
- Violence including threats and active shooter

Consider the following when preparing an emergency action plan:

- Duties/responsibilities of key personnel
- Ready access to important personal information about your employees. This includes their home telephone numbers, the names and telephone numbers of their next of kin, and any pertinent medical information
- Specific jobsite information such as ingress and egress and site security
- Procedures for reporting fires and other emergencies
- Evacuation procedures or assembly locations (sometime called muster points or areas of refuge), routes, procedures, and safe distances. Include a map if applicable. These may differ depending on the type of emergency
- Emergency organizational chart with phone numbers and responsibilities
- Spill emergency procedures
- Shut down procedures if applicable
- Post emergency numbers in a highly visible and accessible location
- Invite emergency responders to tour the jobsite noting ingress/egress, security requirements and any fire department connection locations.
- Emergency alarms such as audible and visual devices
- External communications and media guidelines
- Be sure that any visitors are accounted for
- Locations of first aid kits and of automated external defibrillator (AED's) and communicate who are trained to use them
- Locations of fire extinguishers
- Ensure that fire hydrants and standpipes are always accessible by the fire department

Training

- Train workers on the types of emergencies that may occur and the procedures in the event of those emergencies. Conduct and document practice drills.
- Review the organizational chart and responsibilities
- Review the location and use of common emergency equipment such as fire extinguishers and emergency defibrillators if provided
- Review methods for preventing unauthorized access to the site
- Consider specific training on the following:
 - First aid training
 - Respiratory protection
 - Protection against bloodborne pathogens
 - Fire extinguisher training
 - Spill training
 - PPE that may be required in the event of certain emergencies
 - Mock emergency training including evacuation procedures and assembly locations
 - Active shooter training
- Consider training when the job site annually or after:
 - Development of the initial plan
 - Newly hired workers
 - Changing conditions on the project site
 - Revision or updating of emergency procedures.

Below are some OSHA resources for developing emergency preparedness, emergency action and response plans:

[OSHA's guide to emergency preparedness and response](#)

[OSHA's guide to emergency action plans](#)

[OSHA's guide to emergency response plans](#)

The Zurich Natural Hazards Resource Hub includes insights to help businesses prepare for, respond to, and recover from natural hazards, including hurricanes, wildfires, convective storms, flooding, winter storms and earthquakes

[Zurich Natural Hazards Resource Hub](#)

Conclusion

Comprehensive plans and worker training should result in faster response times, fewer injuries, and reduced damage. Having an emergency preparedness plan in place enables the project team to react quickly in the event of an emergency. Training and mock drills further enhance the ability to react quickly and minimize injuries and losses.

References

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF LABOR, (n.d.). Occupational Safety and Health Administration, Emergency Preparedness and Response: Getting Started. Retrieved from <https://www.osha.gov/emergency-preparedness/getting-started>.

March 2023

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