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DEVELOPING AN EMERGENCY RESPONSE PLAN (ERP)

Imagine...the weather-alert radio message warns of severe thunderstorms and issues a tornado warning for your facility; a small, smoky fire breaks out in a janitorial closet on the floor below you in a 25-story office building near the Galleria; a call comes into an elementary school principal's office warning of an armed robbery suspect spotted a couple of blocks from the elementary school, and police are conducting a search that may include the school grounds. Any, or all of these incidents occur daily, in every part of the country. How will the personnel affected know how to respond appropriately?

A well-written and regularly practiced emergency response plan (ERP) ensures that consistent, calculated, and deliberate actions are taken in any emergency situation. Written plans ensure that emergencies are identified, appropriate actions are defined, and that personnel are trained and informed when they must react to any emergency. Regularly practiced responses to emergency situations ensure that measured and composed responses are taken by the personnel affected.

THE PARTS OF A BASIC EMERGENCY RESPONSE PLAN (ERP)

The actions taken in the initial minutes of an emergency are critical. A prompt warning to employees to evacuate, shelter, or lockdown can save lives. A call for help to public emergency services that provides full and accurate information will help the dispatcher send the right responders and equipment. An employee trained to administer first aid or perform CPR can be lifesaving.

An effective emergency response plan will contain the following sections:

- Reporting the situation and alerting authorities.
- Alerting staff and visitors of an emergency.
- Evacuation procedures, escape routes, and floor plans.
- Identifying a media contact person.
- Accounting for people after implementing an ERP.
- Notifying parents, guardians, or next of kin.
- Training new staff.

HOW TO DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT AN ERP

1. Establish a planning team. Appoint a capable team and team leader

to develop the Emergency Response Plan. The team must be well informed of what is expected, the deadline for development and implementation, and any budget constraints. The size of the team will depend on the organization's location, the organization's operations, and what resources will be dedicated to emergency responses.

2. Evaluate current plans, procedures and incident or drill records. If there is an existing ERP, it should be assessed and reviewed. The team must ensure that any recent ERP meets the present needs and is updated to meet current requirements and expectations.

3. Identify possible emergencies or hazards. Conduct an assessment of the probable emergencies or hazards that are associated with the location and operations of the office, site, or facility. Evaluate emergencies that have occurred in the past. Make a list of possible emergency situations and develop the appropriate response for each situation.

4. Emergency resources. Identify the resources that are on-hand and available to respond to urgent situations and the resources that will need to be requested to respond to emergencies. Develop a relationship with emergency service providers and ensure they have a copy of the current ERP and up-to-date phone number contacts.

5. Review codes and regulations. The development of an effective ERP requires knowledge of emergency response measures and the relevant government regulations and codes of practice in order to direct personnel on procedures to follow and notification to be given in case of an emergency.

6. Training Programs. All personnel affected by the ERP require training that includes conducting safety meetings, reviews of procedures, the use of fire extinguishers, evacuation drills, fire survival techniques, and other actions required by the plan. Selected employees may also receive training in first aid and CPR.

7. Communication. Emergencies must be efficiently reported to first response support teams, employees, neighboring businesses and residences, the community, news media, and other interested parties such as employees' families and company customers. An Emergency Response Organization Chart plays a major role in maintaining effective communication especially during a crisis.

8. Write the plan. Someone who is knowledgeable and capable to write clear concise copy should write the ERP. An editorial review by an editor who was not involved in the development or writing of the

content will help to ensure consistency of presentation style and to fix annoying typographic and grammatical errors. When the plan is completed, it needs to be published and made available to all personnel.

9. Implement the plan. Safety meetings or specific training programs introduce the Emergency Response Plan to employees. Information about the plan can be posted on bulletin boards and in employee newsletters. Practice drills should be planned to be as realistic as possible and may include participation by outside support services.

PURPOSE OF THE ERP

The main purpose, primary objective, and the ultimate goal of any emergency response plan (ERP) is to protect life.

The ERP is a carefully developed plan that is designed to ensure that personnel can effectively respond to a variety of emergency situations. All personnel affected by the ERP should be familiar with their role, and be able to perform their assigned functions, within the plan.

An emergency response plan is designed to comply with applicable government regulations and standards for responding to emergency situations. The main purpose of an ERP is to effectively prevent/mitigate, prepare for, respond to, and recover from all incidents and emergencies. Each organization should have an emergency response plan that is specific to its operations.

GOALS OF THE PLAN

The primary goal of any ERP is always to prevent incidents before they happen, but if they do, then personnel within the organization must be prepared to respond safely and effectively. Other goals of the Emergency Response Plan are to establish and maintain the procedures, plans, resources, and roles that will:

- Reduce or remove the effects of emergency incidents and prevent exposures from turning into larger emergency incidents
- Prepare for, and respond to emergencies
- Activate, mobilize, and coordinate all necessary resources and activities to manage the emergency's immediate consequences
- Restore the affected area back to pre-incident or better condition and learn from the event

OBJECTIVES OF THE PLAN

To accomplish these goals are the following objectives:

- Complete hazard identification and consequence analysis to develop specific emergency procedures and plans
- Train all personnel who may be involved in a response
- Maintain competent and sufficient resources and service providers
- Complete exercises to test the plan and procedures
- Consult, communicate with, and inform the public and other external agencies, as appropriate, of the procedures, plans, and training materials to educate and prepare those who may be involved in or affected by an emergency
- Develop, implement, establish and report on controls to prevent, manage and mitigate conditions during an emergency
- Regularly evaluate and continually improve incident management, regulatory requirements, and community relations plans and protocols
- Transition from the emergency phase to the recovery phase to ensure that sites are remediated
- Communicate lessons learned from exercises and events as part of the continuous improvement of the ERP

EVERYBODY NEEDS A PLAN

Every business, facility, field-site, and organization should have an emergency response plan. All personnel must be trained in ERP procedures and trained how to react to any emergency situation.

An emergency response plan cannot be generic and must include site-specific details that are unique to the facility and situation.

An effective ERP is developed and implemented to ensure that all personnel can respond to emergency situations in a consistent, methodical, and organized manner and for the protection of employees, visitors, contractors and anyone else in the facility.

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