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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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Emergency Response Plan (ERP) Checklist

Courtesy of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA)

General Issues		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Does the plan consider all natural or human-made emergencies that could disrupt your workplace?	Common sources of emergencies identified in emergency action plans include fires, explosions, floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, toxic material releases, radiological and biological accidents, civil disturbances, and workplace violence.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Does the plan consider all potential internal sources of emergencies that could disrupt your workplace?	Conduct a hazard assessment of the workplace to identify any physical or chemical hazards that might exist and could cause an emergency.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Does the plan consider the impact of these internal and external emergencies on the workplace's operations and is the response tailored to the workplace?	Brainstorm worst-case scenarios. Ask yourself what you would do, what the likely impact on your operation would be, and what the device-appropriate responses would be.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Does the plan contain a list of key personnel with contact information as well as contact information for local emergency responders, agencies and contractors?	Keep your list of key contacts current and make provisions for an emergency communications system, such as a cellular phone or a portable radio unit, so that contact with local law enforcement, the fire department, and others can be swift.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Does the plan contain the names, titles, departments, and telephone numbers of people to contact for additional information or an explanation of duties and responsibilities under the plan?	List names and contact information for people responsible for implementing the plan.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Does the plan address how rescue operations will be performed?	Unless you are a large employer handling hazardous materials and processes, or you have employees regularly working in hazardous situations, you will probably rely on local public resources, such as the fire department, which is trained, equipped, and certified to conduct rescues. Make sure any external department or agency identified in your plan is prepared to respond as outlined in your plan. Untrained people may endanger themselves and those they are trying to rescue.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Does the plan address how medical assistance will be provided?	Most small employers do not have a formal internal medical program and instead make arrangements with nearby medical clinics or facilities to handle emergencies. If an infirmary, clinic, or hospital is not close to your workplace, ensure that onsite person(s) have adequate training in first aid. The American Red Cross, some insurance providers, local safety councils, fire departments, or other resources may be able to provide this training. Treatment of a serious injury should begin within three to four minutes of the accident. Consult a physician to order appropriate first-aid supplies for emergencies. Establish a relationship with a local ambulance service so that transportation is readily available for emergencies.

General Issues		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Does the plan identify how or where personal information on employees can be obtained in an emergency?	In an emergency, it could be important to have ready access to important personal information about your employees. This includes their home telephone numbers, names and telephone numbers of their next of kin, and medical information.
Evacuation Policy and Procedure		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Does the plan identify the conditions under which an evacuation would be necessary?	The plan should identify situations that will require an evacuation of the workplace. This might include a fire, earthquake, or chemical spill. The extent of evacuation needed may be different for different types of hazards.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Does the plan identify a clear chain of command and designate a person authorized to order an evacuation or shutdown of operations?	It is common practice to select a responsible person to lead and coordinate your emergency plan and evacuation. It is critical that employees know who the coordinator is and that they understand that this person has the authority to make decisions during emergencies. The coordinator is responsible for assessing the situation to determine whether an emergency exists requiring activation of the emergency procedures, overseeing emergency procedures, notifying and coordinating with outside emergency services, and directing shutdown of utilities or plant operations if necessary.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Does the plan address the types of actions expected of various employees for the types of potential emergencies?	The plan may specify different actions for employees depending on the emergency. For example, employers may want to have employees assemble in one area of the workplace if it is threatened by a tornado or earthquake but evacuate to an exterior location during a fire.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Does the plan designate who, if anyone, will stay to shut down critical operations during an evacuation?	Consider including locations of where to shut down utilities, such as electrical and gas utilities, for all or part of the facility. All people remaining behind to shut down critical systems or utilities must be capable of recognizing when to abandon the operation or task and evacuate themselves.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Does the plan outline specific evacuation routes and exits, and are these posted in the workplace where they are easily accessible to all employees?	Most employers create maps from floor diagrams with arrows that designate exit route assignments. These maps should include locations of exits, assembly points and equipment (such as fire extinguishers, first-aid kits, and spill kits) that may be needed in an emergency. Exit routes should be clearly marked and well lit, wide enough to accommodate the number of evacuating personnel, unobstructed and clear of debris at all times, and unlikely to expose evacuating personnel to additional hazards.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Does the plan address procedures for assisting people during evacuations, particularly those with disabilities or who do not speak English?	Many employers designate evacuation wardens to help move employees from dangerous to safe areas during an emergency. Generally, one warden for every 20 employees is adequate, and the appropriate number of wardens should be available at all times during working hours. Wardens may be responsible for checking offices and bathrooms before being the last person to exit an area as well as for ensuring that fire doors are closed when exiting. Employees designated to assist in emergency evacuation procedures should be trained in the complete workplace layout and alternative escape routes. Employees designated to assist in emergencies should be made aware of employees with special needs (who may require extra assistance during an evacuation), how to use the buddy system, and any hazardous areas to avoid during an emergency evacuation.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Does the plan identify one or more assembly areas (as necessary for different types of emergencies) where employees will gather and a method for accounting for all employees?	Accounting for all employees following an evacuation is critical. Confusion in the assembly areas can lead to delays in rescuing anyone trapped in the building, or to unnecessary and dangerous search-and-rescue operations. To ensure the fastest, most accurate accounting of your employees, consider taking a head count after the evacuation. The names and last known locations of anyone not accounted for should be passed on to the official in charge.

Evacuation Policy and Procedure

<input type="checkbox"/>	Does the plan address how visitors will be accounted for and assisted in evacuation?	Some employers have all visitors and contractors sign in when entering the workplace. The hosts or area wardens, if established, are often given the task of helping visitors and contractors evacuate safely.
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Reporting Emergencies and Alerting Employees in an Emergency

<input type="checkbox"/>	Does the plan identify a preferred method for reporting fires and other emergencies?	Dialing 911 is a common method for reporting emergencies if external responders are used. Internal numbers may be used and are sometimes connected to intercom systems so that coded announcements may be made. In some cases, employees are requested to activate manual pull stations or other alarm systems.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Does the plan describe the method used to alert employees, including disabled workers, to evacuate or take other action?	Make sure alarms are distinctive and recognized by all employees. Sequences of horn blows or different types of alarms (such as bells or horns) can be used to signal different responses or actions from employees. Consider making an emergency communications system available, such as a public address system, for broadcasting emergency information to employees. Ideally, alarms will be able to be heard, seen, or otherwise perceived by everyone in the workplace, including those who are blind or deaf. Otherwise, floor wardens or others must be given the task of ensuring that all employees are notified. Consider providing an auxiliary power supply in an electrical failure.

Employee Training and Drills

<input type="checkbox"/>	Does the plan identify how and when employees will be trained so that they understand the types of emergencies that may occur, their responsibilities, and actions?	<p>Train employees when you develop your initial plan and when new employees are hired. Retrain employees when your plan changes due to a change in facility layout or design of the facility, when new equipment, hazardous materials, or processes are introduced that affect evacuation routes, or when new types of hazards are introduced that require special actions. General training for your employees should address:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • individual roles and responsibilities; • threats, hazards, and protective actions; • notification, warning, and communications procedures; • emergency response procedures; • evacuation, shelter, and accountability procedures; • location and use of common emergency equipment; and • emergency shutdown procedures. <p>You may also need to provide additional training to your employees (for example, first-aid procedures, portable fire extinguisher use) depending on the responsibilities in your plan.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Does the plan address how and when retraining will be conducted?	If training is not reinforced, it will be forgotten. Consider retraining employees annually.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Does the plan address if and how often drills will be conducted?	Once you have reviewed your emergency action plan with your employees and everyone has had the proper training, it is a good idea to hold practice drills as often as necessary. Include outside resources, such as fire and police departments, when possible. After each drill, gather management and employees to evaluate the effectiveness of the drill. Identify the strengths and weaknesses of your plan and work to improve it.