

Types of Workplace Emergencies and How to Handle Them

by Aaron | Jan 7, 2019 | Health and Safety | 0 comments



When an emergency occurs in the workplace, seconds can often be the difference between some extra paperwork and risk to life and limb. The very nature of emergencies means you never know when you may be required to act, so understanding the types of emergencies that may occur, and the steps that should be taken to handle them is crucial.

What Constitutes a Workplace Emergency?

Workplace emergencies come in a variety of forms. Some potential emergencies will be specific to certain industries and work environments, whereas others are more global, presenting a risk to all workplaces.

Understanding the types of emergencies your workplace may experience is the first step in being able to plan and train for their occurrence.

A workplace emergency is an event that occurs and endangers your employees, clients, or the public; or risks disrupting your workplace operations; or causes damage. Emergencies can take many forms, but will largely fall into three categories — natural, work-related, and external.

Natural emergencies

Natural emergencies are the hardest to plan for and predict due to their very nature. A natural emergency could occur as a result of flooding, severe weather such as hurricanes or tornadoes, or forest fires. When planning for natural emergencies you should consider that they will likely not be limited only your workplace, which could affect logistical responses.

Work-related emergencies

These are the biggest group of emergencies that a workplace may experience, these emergencies are caused by factors relating directly to the work conducted. Work-related emergencies could be things such as chemical spills, explosions, machinery malfunction, or dangerous gas releases.

Civil emergencies

This final group of workplace emergencies are emergencies that stem from civil factors. These emergencies are likely to be rarer than work-related or nature emergencies, but that doesn't mean they are any less serious. Civil factors could be things such as protests, strikes, or workplace violence or harassment, either employee-to-employee or client-based.

Regardless of the type of emergency your workplace experiences, it's important to be prepared so that the damage to your employees, your customers, and your business is minimised as much as possible. Making decisions during a crisis can be tough even for the calmest level-headed among us, so having a well-thought-out emergency plan that clearly outlines the steps and actions to be taken is crucial, and also a legally required.

How to Handle Workplace Emergencies

The best way to prepare for an emergency and minimise the damage is to have a well-thought-out plan in place. But what exactly should an emergency response plan look like?

The first step in creating a plan is to brainstorm the worst-case scenarios that you befall your workplace. Natural and civil type emergencies will be mostly universal to all workplaces (although the responses may differ). The trickier part is evaluating emergencies that may result from factors directly related to the work you do. A good starting point is to use a previous risk assessment that identifies the risks, and ways to mitigate them, in the workplace. But emergency plans should also account for unforeseen risks that could develop into an emergency situation.

The plan itself should be tailored to your specific workplace as each work environment will have different risks that could lead to emergencies, and there will likely be different logistical considerations when handling them. Workplace emergency plans aren't a one size fits all, but they should all include the same core features.

Chain of Command

Having a clear chain-of-command will help to prevent any confusion during an emergency. The response plan should include details of the appointed coordinator and a backup option. The coordinator's job will be to oversee the emergency response, communicate and liaise with internal and external emergency response and service teams, ensure that any operations or areas are shut down and secured where required, and ensure that all at-risk personnel are notified and evacuated.

Emergency Response Personnel

Listed within the plan should be a number of designated emergency response personnel, their designated roles, and backup personnel in the case of the primary appointees being unavailable. Emergency response personnel will be

responsible for dedicated tasks such as fire safety or medical assistance. Depending on the work environment and its hazards, they could also include personnel trained in special tasks such as the handling, control, and cleanup of toxic or hazardous chemical spills.

Emergency equipment

Being able to respond quickly to emergencies is crucial in limiting damage. The details and locations of any and all emergency equipment should be clearly listed for the benefit of both emergency response teams within the company and emergency service personnel. The location of items such as automatic external defibrillators (AED), fire extinguishers, chemical containment equipment, machinery controls/shutoffs, and water mains access points should be included here.

Evacuation procedures

The plan should include the details of any evacuation procedures that may be required during an emergency. This section of the plan should include the details of emergency exits, the location of stairs to avoid lifts, and the location of rally points where employees should congregate once evacuated to prevent interference with emergency personnel and allow for easy head counts.

Alarms

Another core feature of the plan should be details of the alarms that will sound during an incident, what they mean, and the expected action from employees. This is important as different actions may be required for different types of emergencies; for example, employees will be expected to evacuate during a fire, but during machinery malfunction, they may be required to lock down their area and stay in position to prevent further injury.

Additional Inclusions

While not legally mandated, it can be a good idea to include information within the plan as to a location for rendezvous and communication during an emergency out with the workplace, and a location where important documents and data are backed-up. It can also be useful to include a point of contact for

employees to receive updates in the hours and days after the emergency, for instance, whether they should return to work.

How can Conserve help?

Conserve offers our industry-leading workplace health and safety management systems to help you ensure whatever the emergency the damage will be limited as much as possible. With our system, you can track employees' documentation, responsibilities, and qualifications, [pre-qualify contractors](#), get real-time notifications when training or documents are expiring, record crucial incident related information, as well as store and distribute important documents like your emergency plan.

Whether integrated into your existing health and safety processes or deployed as a standalone solution, our system can help you to ensure that when emergencies occur everybody in your workplace is ready to handle the situation and stays as safe as possible.

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