

The Power of Simplicity**Emergency Preparedness – Fires**

You are sitting in the office, and suddenly, the fire alarm goes off once again. You look around and no one else seems to be bothered, so you keep working with thoughts of “This is not my first rodeo” crossing your mind followed by the countless tasks that would be delayed yet again by evacuating. This is typically the response many employees take, and unfortunately could result in a larger, more serious disaster.

When discussing fire readiness, companies should incorporate tools to prevent fires, develop emergency actions plans, and prepare employees to act.

Prevention

We rely on everyone to watch for fire hazards and to report them or eliminate them. If a fire does break out, we depend on everyone to react appropriately.

The “Dos” and “Don’ts” for proper safety evacuation and protection to prevent fires are:

Do -

- Have an emergency action and fire prevention plan in place.
- Keep exit doors unlocked from the inside at all times.
- Keep exit routes free and unobstructed.
- Have at least two exit routes.
- Ensure emergency safeguards, such as sprinkler systems, alarm systems, fire doors, and exit lighting are in proper working order at all times.
- Keep signs posted along the exit access indicating the direction to the nearest exit.
- Maintain portable fire extinguishers in a fully charged and operating condition.
- Report any safety hazards to your supervisor.

Don't -

- Overload electrical circuits.
- Forget to conduct an annual maintenance check of all portable fire extinguishers.
- Lock exit doors from the inside.
- Place equipment or signs that obscure the visibility of the door.
- Forget to have an emergency action plan that includes floor plans and maps.
- Make assumptions that alarm systems are in proper working order.
- Use extension cords as a permanent solution.

The Power of Simplicity**Emergency Action Plan**

An emergency action plan is a written document that identifies procedures for employees to take during times of emergencies. An emergency action plan can be tailored to specific company needs, but at minimum, must include the following:

- Procedures for reporting a fire or other emergency.
- Procedures for emergency evacuation, including type of evacuation.
- Meeting locations.
- Procedures to follow.
- Accounting for all employees after an emergency evacuation.
- Rescue and Medical Duties for employees performing them.
- The name or job title of every employee who may be contacted by employees who need more information.

Prepare

Fire drills are an important aspect to any well-developed emergency action plan. A fire drill will not only bring life to the written documents, but will also give invaluable real-world experience to those in charge and confidence to those participating. Using the emergency action plan as a guide, evaluate what went wrong and request feedback from employees to see where things might need to be removed or new routes should be incorporated.

Besides fire drills, training can also focus on emergency efforts when evacuation is not an option. One could train employees on how to close off a room to avoid smoke and/or heat from entering by using common office items such as tape. Or letting employees know if they are stuck in a room to call the Fire Department first and provide a general location for First Responders.

Fire drills will test everything that you do to protect your employees – your alarms, your procedures, etc. The worst thing that could happen is a real-life emergency occur and have no one know where to go. Drills save lives. The effectiveness in responding to an emergency depends on the amount of planning and training carried out. The commitment of management is a primary factor in the successful implementation of an emergency plan.