

PERSONNEL NOTEBOOK

For Your Most Important Resource—The Human Resource

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EMERGENCIES AT WORK

Several years ago while doing an HR audit for a company, a fire broke out on one of the floors. Alarms went off, lights were flashing and people were grumbling about another false alarm. We left the building and went to the parking lot where we then saw smoke coming from the second floor!

While the fire was being handled, rumors began to flow about eight missing employees. Were they still inside the building? The firemen went deeper into the building to find them. They could find no one.

Later, after much confusion and emotional outbursts, it was determined that five of the employees did not come in at all that day and three others had left the premises after the fire occurred. Needless to say, the firemen gave out a lot of lectures that day.

How do you handle an emergency if you are the one responsible for doing so?

FEMA:

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is the recognized expert on emergency response. They outlined the following procedures for us.

Although there are numerous types of emergencies with which to deal, let's concentrate on the most significant.

I. Fires

- II. Tornadoes
- III. Hurricanes
- IV. Winter Storms

I. FIRES

The most common of all hazards, fires require the emergency manager to develop a fire emergency program and to provide immediate response to a fire. Most of the items listed under Fire are applicable to all emergencies.

A. Planning:

1. Designate someone to be the emergency response officer.
2. Meet with the fire department to prepare an emergency response program tailored to your company. See if they can provide in-house training for employees and if they have any forms or materials to aid in an emergency.
3. Talk to your insurance company to ask for recommendations. They may also offer training and even lower insurance premiums.
4. Distribute fire safety information and instructions to employees.
5. Conduct periodic drills.
6. Assign emergency wardens in each department or section of your company. They will conduct and supervise an emergency response in their area. Pick someone with excellent attendance and/or assure that they will assign another in their absence.

7. Provide for the safe disposal, handling and storage of all combustible materials.
8. Identify the location of all fire extinguishers and inform all employees verbally, in writing and with posted signs, of their location.
9. Identify each emergency exit. Inform all employees verbally, in writing and with posted signs of their location.
10. Create a layout, a floor plan in clear detail and keep it available to provide to firemen when they arrive. The drawing should show all floors, the location of stairways and elevators and the location of all combustible materials.

B. Fire Emergency Response:

1. Notify fire department.
2. Evacuate building. All employees (this means you, too) leave immediately!
3. Use stairs only. Elevators can be traps. In addition, fire teams often need elevators to transport equipment.
4. All employees assemble by department group in a pre-designated area, like the parking lot or across the street, etc.
5. Each department should create a list of all employees present. Immediately inform the fire department of who is missing.
6. The emergency response officer should remain available to the fire team to provide all information such as floor plans and the locations of fire extinguishers, stairways, elevators, and flammables.
7. Do not allow anyone to reenter the building until cleared by the fire department official.

II. TORNADOES

A. Planning

Tornadoes are incredibly violent storms that can reach 300 mph. They can uproot trees, hurl automobiles into the air and turn harmless objects into deadly missiles.

Tornadoes can strike as suddenly and as unforeseen as a fire.

1. Contact your local emergency office, fire department or national weather service about the community's tornado warning system.
2. Purchase a NOAA weather radio with a warning tone and battery backup.
3. Work with a structural engineer, architect and/or emergency response center to determine the best place in the building to designate as the evacuation location. Consider the amount of space needed. (Approximately six square feet per person. Nursing homes and hospital patients need more.)

The best locations are usually:

- a. In an underground area
- b. Small interior rooms on the lowest floor and without windows.
- c. Hallways on the lowest level away from doors and windows.
- d. Rooms constructed with reinforced concrete, brick or block with no windows and a heavy concrete floor or roof overhead.
- e. Protected areas away from doors and windows.

Note: Auditoriums, cafeterias and gymnasiums with a wide, flat span roof are not considered safe.

4. Make plans to evacuate personnel away from lightweight modular offices, mobile home size or type buildings.
5. Conduct tornado drills.

B. Tornado Emergency Response:

1. Sound emergency alarm or use public address (PA) system or call each department's emergency warden and direct everyone to evacuate to the pre-designated area. Take emergency weather radio with you.
2. Make an attendance list to identify any missing employees.

3. Once in shelter, everyone should protect their head with their arms and crouch down.
4. After the all clear announcement, assist those in immediate need and try to leave area.

The weather warning notices for tornadoes are:

- A. Tornado Watch. Tornadoes are likely. Be prepared to take shelter. Stay tuned to radio and television stations for additional information.
- B. Tornado Warning. A tornado has been sighted in the area or is indicated by radar. Take shelter now.

III. HURRICANES

Hurricanes are severe tropical storms usually initiated over the ocean or the Gulf of Mexico. Hurricanes have sustained winds of 74 mph or greater. Winds can reach 160 mph and can extend inland for hundreds of miles. Hurricanes can create tornadoes. The hurricane season lasts from June through September.

A. Planning:

1. As with fire and tornadoes, discuss your specific plan with local community emergency response offices, your fire department or the National Weather Service.
2. Establish a building (or facility) shutdown procedure. Establish a warning alarm tone system with battery backup.
3. Purchase a NOAA weather radio with a warning tone and a battery backup.
4. Survey your facility. Make plans to protect outside equipment and structures.
5. Make plans to protect windows. Permanent storm windows offer the best protection. Covering windows with 5/8" marine plywood is a second option.
6. Consider the need for backup systems for portable pumps to remove

floodwaters, alternate power sources such as generators, or gasoline powered pumps and battery powered emergency lighting.

7. Be prepared to move records, computers and other items to a safer location within your facility or to another location away from the facility.

B. Hurricane Emergency Response:

1. If a hurricane watch occurs, remind employees of the emergency procedures and the evacuation locations. Advise them of the emergency alarm that will occur if it becomes necessary to evacuate.
2. If a hurricane warning occurs, and if it indicates that evacuation is advised or if you identify signs of a tornado in your area, then sound the alarm for everyone to evacuate to the pre-designated protection area. (Same locations as identified for tornadoes.)
3. Create a list of names of all personnel in attendance and determine if any are missing
4. Once in the shelter, everyone should protect their head with their arms and crouch down.
5. After the all clear announcement is made, assist those in immediate need and try to leave the area.

The weather warnings for hurricanes are:

- A. Hurricane Watch. A hurricane will hit land within 24 hours. Take precautions at once. If advised, evacuate area immediately.
- B. Hurricane Warning. A hurricane is possible within 24 to 36 hours. Stay tuned for additional advisories. Tune to local radio and television stations for additional information. An evacuation may be necessary.

IV. SEVERE WINTER STORMS

A. Planning

1. Create a policy (it should be placed in your employee handbook) notifying everyone of your policies and procedures for severe winter storms. Notify employees of your policy regarding use of paid leave time, unpaid leave time, vacation usage, etc., in the event of a company shutdown or an employee's inability to report to work due to severe winter storm.
2. Obtain a NOAA weather radio and/or refer to radio or television stations for weather notices.
3. Establish procedures for facility shutdown. Consider arrangements for early release of employees. Advise employees to have a backup transportation plan in the event of a storm.
4. Store emergency food, water, blankets, battery powered radio with extra batteries and other emergency supplies for employees who may be stranded.
5. Arrange for snow and ice removal from parking lots, walkways, loading docks, etc.

B. Severe Winter Storm Response

1. For employees who determine that they are leaving because they fear a severe storm even though none is yet identified. Allow them to exercise whatever leave your policy allows (unpaid leave, vacation, personal leave, etc.). Those that decide to leave prior to the company making that decision, usually do so at their own expense.
2. If the decision is made to close the facility (determine ahead of time who will make that decision and under what conditions), notify employees before it is too late to leave. Don't hesitate so long that employees are likely to be stranded in the weather.
3. Release employees. Assure that the facility is protected and that emergency

supplies are available in case someone is stranded.

Summary:

1. Designate someone to be the emergency program officer.
2. Create an emergency response team for your company.
3. Contact emergency authorities in your community to set up an emergency response program.
4. Create an evacuation and warning system.
5. Notify and drill employees regarding emergency response procedures.
6. Create posted notices, signs, warning signals, and floor plans.
7. Create a nose count or attendance system to identify all personnel present or missing. Notify emergency responders immediately.
8. React quickly and decisively. Don't hesitate to act when conditions call for action.

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