



What If the Worst Happens?

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How prepared are you for an emergency? Do your employees know what to do if the building is on fire? Do you know what to do if someone is injured?

Even if you haven't consciously taken any steps towards emergency planning, you're not completely unprepared. You probably have exit signs, to guide people towards a safe path outside. You are likely to have fire extinguishers, so the very small fire can be stopped before it grows. You might have a fire sprinkler system, to keep a fire in check if it does begin to spread. You've probably purchased some sorbent, such as floor dry, to clean up the small spills. Those are a start, as long as they keep working right.

How will you notify everyone if there is an emergency? If you have remote areas in your facility, or if your facility is broken up, how will everyone know if they should evacuate or take shelter?

If people need to flee the building because of a fire, where should they go? Not home, because you need to account for everyone. You don't want to risk a firefighter's life to hunt for someone comfortably lounging at home. Pick a meeting spot, near the building but away from the route that fire trucks will take. Post it and tell employees about it, so they remember to go there.

We may not get as many tornados as Kansas, but we've gotten them in the middle of the big city. Where should people go in case of a tornado warning? Choose a room, away from windows, in the most protected part of your building, and designate that as your storm shelter.



What would you do if a 55-gallon drum of lacquer thinner or a 270-gallon tote of oil ruptured? Would you be able to stop it from getting into your drains? Would you be running around in search of all the kitty litter in the neighborhood? And if it was lacquer thinner, what about fire? Plan how you would handle the largest likely spill you could have. Do you need a spill kit? Get it now. Even with the fastest delivery service available, you won't have it when you need it unless you buy it *before* you need it.

If your shop starts to smell like rotten eggs, you should suspect a gas leak. Call 9-1-1 and your natural gas provider. Do you know that emergency number? Instead of hurriedly hunting it down, post that and other emergency numbers by the phones in your shop. Include your cell

phone, so your employees can let you know about the emergency if you're out of the shop. Include your building address, too. That's something people can blank on, particularly when in a stressful emergency.

While you're putting together your list of emergency numbers, think of any vendors or support personnel you might need to call. Do you have a landlord? What about an alarm company? Include those numbers.

If someone is injured at work and needs medical attention, will you bring him to the emergency room? That could result in hours wasted in a waiting room, while the emergency rooms are busy with life-threatening emergencies. That bad cut that needs stitches will take a back seat. Instead, plan now – is there an occupational health clinic near you? An urgent care center? Don't forget to include their numbers and addresses in your emergency list.

How will you notify the employee's family of the injury? Ask employees for emergency contacts, and remind them at least annually to update those. The worst time to try to figure out how to reach Joe's wife is during an emergency. Don't wait until Joe is in an ambulance on the way to the hospital to start wishing you had updated that information.

That emergency contact information and the list of emergency numbers is really useful if you're in your office when the emergency occurs. But what if it was a fire and you had to get out quickly? Do you have any way to look up Joe's information if you're not at your desk? You have options – keep a backup at a neighbor's business, store the information on your phone, use cloud storage.... But none of those work if you don't take advantage of them.

The almost last, crucial step in planning for emergencies: tell your employees your plan. Make sure your employees know what to do and where to go. If you expect them to use a fire extinguisher, train them on how to use it. If you have a designated meeting spot for evacuations, tell them where it is. If you want them to play a specific role in the emergency, such as going outside to meet the emergency responders, notifying others in the building or taking the lead for spill cleanup, make sure they know what to do and how to do it.

And finally, consider practicing. Schools are required to have fire drills, so everyone knows what to do in case of fire. You're not required to do that. But people don't instinctively know how to use a fire extinguisher, or where to go if there's severe weather. If people have to physically carry out an action, such as evacuating, they're more likely to remember how to do that when the disaster strikes.

If you have questions about emergency and disaster planning, handling workplace injuries, workplace safety rules, or other safety issues, contact CHESS at 651-481-9787; toll free at 877-482-4377, or carkey@chess-safety.com.

This article is intended to provide general information (not advice) about current safety topics. To discuss your specific concerns and how CHESS may help, please contact CHESS at 651-481-9787 or chess@chess-safety.com
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