Would You Know How to Evacuate?

Chances are you will never have the need to evacuate your building because of an emergency. But, the reality is, disasters do happen and you need to know how to react if one occurs at your workplace.

A partial or total evacuation of the workplace is necessary in a number of instances, including:

- Fire or smoke
- Hazardous materials
- Natural disasters
- Extended power outages
- Bomb threats
- Biological agents

The most important thing you can do is to be prepared in the event of an emergency—that means, know what and how to react before an even occurs.

Alarm Systems

Alarm systems can come in many forms. It is important that you are familiar with the specific system used by your facility—know where they are located, what they sound and look like, and how to activate them.

Both audible and visual alarm signals should be used to accommodate visual or hearing-impaired employees.

The most important thing you can do for your own safety and safety of your co-workers is to be prepared.

- Know your evacuation route.
- Participate in drills.
- Keep exit routes clear.
- Help others in need.

Your Company has a Plan

The Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA) requires employers to have a written Emergency Action Plan (29 CFR 1910.38) which must contain information such as:

- Evacuation procedures
- Exit routes identified
- Alarm systems and other means of reporting emergencies
- Rescue and medical duties
- Employee training requirements
- Other employee responsibilities during emergencies, in addition to evacuation

These plans are there to protect every employee in the event of an emergency. Be sure to read and understand the written Emergency Action Plan for your workplace.

Evacuation Procedures

Detailed evacuation plans will differ depending on your facility. However, there are some basic guidelines that are generally followed:

1. **Know the evacuation signal.** It is important that you can immediately recognize an emergency signal. Signals take different forms including:
   - Audible alarms
   - Visual signals
   - Public address announcements
   - Air horns
   - Yelling

2. **Listen for specific instructions.**
   - Only a partial evacuation may be required.
   - Knowing the location of the fire or emergency will help you determine which route to take.

3. **Shut down any nearby equipment** with an emergency stop.

4. **Follow** to the nearest exit route.

5. **Proceed** to the designated meeting area.
Workplace Emergency and Evacuation

Know Your Exit Routes

Exit routes are more than doors or stairwells that lead outside—they are continuous and unobstructed ways to exit from any point in a building.

Exit routes must lead outside to a street, walkway, or open space to allow employees to easily move away from the building.

It is imperative to always keep exit routes clear of any obstructions to allow for smooth flow people. Be sure to keep them clear of:

- File cabinets
- Bookshelves
- Janitorial equipment
- Extra paper for the copy machine
- Other obstructions

Never store combustible items such as cardboard, paper, or certain solvents and maintenance materials, in or around exit routes! This will attract an existing fire.

Note Exit Signs

Exit signs are posted at the doors that lead outside as well as along the exit route. The signs along the exit route will have arrows that indicate the direction of travel.

Exit signs must clearly read EXIT and must be:

- Distinctive in color so they do not blend into the background
- Clearly seen from a distance
- Unobstructed and unobconcealed (do not hang holiday decorations or other signs nearby)
- Self-illuminating or made of reflective material that is illuminated by emergency lighting.

Evacuation Assignments

You may be assigned to specific evacuation duties as described in your Emergency Action Plan. You may be asked to:

- Conduct a walkthrough of specific areas to check that all employees have left.
- Perform a headcount in the designated assembly area.
- Shut down machinery.
- Assign a buddy to help evacuate incapacitated workers.

Know Your Designated Meeting Area

Once an evacuation occurs, all employees and anyone else in the building, including clients and vendors, must be accounted for. For this reason, your employer should make sure that all visitors sign in and out when they come to your building.

In addition, your facility should have a designated meeting area, which might be just across the street or on the far side of the parking lot. Large industrial facilities may have multiple assembly areas, both within and outside the production areas. High-rise buildings may have meeting areas within the building on designated floors or outside the building a block away.

Proceed directly to your designated meeting area. Do not go to your car or to another meeting location. A person will be assigned to conduct the head count at your assembly area. Remember that if you are not there, rescue personnel may assume that you are still in the building and may attempt to search for you.

Evacuating a High-rise Building

High-rise buildings use staged relocation because they have fire protection systems that are designed to control challenging fires.

Staged relocation is when the occupants on the fire floor and floors above immediately above and below are directed to move down the stairs to a refuge floor. Occupants on the other floors remain where they are until they are notified to exit.

It is your decision—you are responsible for your own safety. In the event of an evacuation:

- Evaluate the level of threat.
- Immediately evacuate the building, or
- Follow staged relocation procedures.