Preparing for Emergencies in the Workplace

Safety Talk

What's at Stake

Unexpected emergencies occur in workplaces every day in factories, plants, offices and warehouses, as well as construction sites and on the road. It could be a fire, fatal injury, flood, earthquake, shooting, tornado, chemical spill or another kind of crisis. So it's important that companies have an emergency response plan to cover all expected and unexpected disasters. For this plan to be effective, all employees must be trained in the roles they will play in an emergency.

What's the Danger

If you've never experienced an emergency in your workplace, you might find it hard to imagine such a thing could happen. However, every day in job settings just like yours, something goes seriously wrong. Whether everyone survives and escapes injury often depends on how well they are prepared for an emergency.

Example

You're on a construction site when someone shouts a warning. You look around and see a tornado bearing down on your worksite. Do you know where to find shelter? Or a freight train carrying hazardous chemicals derails behind your plant. It splits apart and bursts into flame. How do you raise the alarm?

How to Protect Yourself

Confusion and panic are often the first obstacles when an unplanned event presents a serious risk to life or limb. That's why an organized approach is the essential ingredient of an emergency response plan. Knowing what to do in case of an

emergency can prevent panic and it can save lives. Here are four things you should know:

1. The possible hazards. You need to know what can go wrong. Are hazardous chemicals stored or transported near your workplace? Is your workplace an essential service or a high-profile setting that could be targeted by terrorists? Are you located in a tornado zone or a natural floodplain?

2. Evacuation procedures. You must know how to get out of the building and reach safety. Right now, can you point out two exits from your work area? Do you know where you are to assemble with your co-workers after an evacuation of the building? This is an important aspect of the emergency procedure, because if you do not show up there, an emergency crew might have to risk injury looking for you.

3. Your duties. Do you know what duties you're expected to perform in an emergency, such as shutting down equipment or checking for stragglers before you leave? Do you know how to call for help and who to call? Emergency phone numbers should be posted at each telephone in your workplace, along with your worksite's address and directions to your work area.

4. The alarm systems. You should also be familiar with the various alarm sounds and lights in your workplace. Alarm systems typically have different signals for fire and intruder emergencies. There may also be specific alarms related to hazardous equipment, chemicals, gases and other hazards.

Final Word

Do your best to plan for the worst. That's the basis of emergency preparedness.