Train the Trainer: Emergency Preparedness

We are all vulnerable to disasters—whether they're the work of Mother Nature in the form of earthquake, tsunami, hurricane, tornado or flood or deliberate acts of mankind in the form of arson, bombing or other act of terrorism. Surviving such disasters often hinges on being prepared.

This is why emergency preparedness and contingency plans are mandatory.

Training is an integral part of preparation. Here's a plan.

Workplace Disasters

Every workplace is at risk for a life safety emergency. Life safety emergency is any unplanned event that could cause death or significant injury to employees, clients or visitors; or that can shut down business, disrupt operations or cause physical and environmental damage. Some examples of life safety emergencies include:

Fire	Lightning	Terrorism
Gas Leaks	Structural damage	Bio-terrorism
Flood	Bomb threat	Civil disturbance
Explosion	Earthquake	Power outage
Hurricane	Snowstorm	Tornado
Hazmat incident	Infectious disease outbreak	Tsunami

Disaster Plan Objectives

The key objectives and components of a successful disaster plan include:

- Continuation of a healthy and safe work environment
- Minimal interruption to business and service operations
- Resumption of critical operations within a specified time frame
- Minimal financial loss
- Assurance to all stakeholders that the company is functional and operational

Phase 1: Pre-Planning

There are three main areas of concern when developing a disaster plan: response, recovery and restoration. But before you even begin drafting the plan, there are two things you need to do first

1. Form a Team

Your first step is to form an Emergency Planning Team (EPT) to develop disaster planning policies and procedures. Include the following personnel or their designated representatives in your EPT:

- Senior officer of the company
- Senior officer of the facility management unit
- Senior officer of the human resources unit
- Local community government official
- Communications officer
- Specialty consultants(e.g., hazardous waste disposal)

This team should meet periodically to review processes, participate in the health & safety committee and conduct periodic table top exercises to ensure everyone understands their role in a disaster situation.

2. Look at Your Mission Statement

As you know, employers are obligated to provide safety and prevent harm to its employees in the workplace from recognized hazards.Natural disasters and terrorism are arguably recognized hazards.

Ideally, a company should have a mission statement that outlines the company’s role and intent to

provide safety to its employees and facility occupants from all recognized hazards. This mission statement will serve as your focus while preparing the disaster plan.

Phase 2: Response Planning

This part of your plan outlines immediate actions in responding to an emergency. It is important to remember that when preparing the plan, you should assume a total communications failure. Your plan must address how communication will be achieved in that event.

Health and life safety, of course, should be your most important concern and you need to consider:
Removal from the affected area may be critical and should be implemented quickly and safely. Ensure that building occupants are familiarized themselves with posted evacuation floor plans and know how to safely exit the premises and proceed to the established assembly/shelter area.

Throughout your facility, post signage for designated Shelter Areas. This signage should indicate where workers and visitors are to go for shelter in the event of severe weather or other emergency, as determined by your chief or senior emergency coordinator.

Caring for victims. Serious injuries or fatalities are another aspect you must address. Your plan should outline how to set up a makeshift triage area and how to triage victims according to the severity of their injuries. (Triage means to sort by priority.) For example: First aid must be applied to those who have broken bones, a vulsions or missing extremities. Efforts should be made to sustain life until appropriate medical personnel arrive.Victims who die because of their injuries must be covered until medical personnel arrive.

The response part of your plan should include a list of all employees who are certified in CPR and first aid. This list should be posted in employee populated areas, such as break rooms, and include the telephone extensions of the certified employees.

Access to supplies. Place disaster kits at various locations within your facility (at least one per floor)in an area that does not require key access. It’s important to include the location of the kits on your evacuation floor plan.

The response part of your plan must be written and practiced. Train employees to be responsive in emergency situations. Frequent drills for fire,tornadoes,earthquakes and bomb threats will help in still the process. Next week, we’ll look at the second key area of concern in emergency planning: recovery.

Phase 3: Recovery

The next phase of emergency response is recovery. After the impact of the disaster or emergency has subsided, the EPT should convene to plan for recovery and minimize downtime.

The EPT should consider the anticipated recovery timelines and assign these to areas needing recovery and restoration. For example, Plan A= immediate recovery – no down time; Plan B= up to four (4) hours to recover, and so on.

When developing your plan, also include a company policy for using an off-site storage area and make sure that all department heads conform. This will ensure that your company can remain in operation in the event of fire or another catastrophe. Having an off-site location to store pertinent media will facilitate recovery.

Debrief Workers

Once you've determined that there's no longer a risk to health and safety, schedule a debriefing with staff members of the affected location. The goal of this meeting is to relieve panic, emotional disequilibrium and stress, as well as institute further recovery and restoration measures.

Expect workers to display or express sadness, anger, anxiety and depression at the meeting. These are normal reactions to a disaster. When talking with affected workers, it's important to: • Maintain patience and listen to what they have to say;

• Keep in mind that other people may have different priorities from yours;

• Realize that it generally takes time to restore things, physically and emotionally; and

• Ensure workers that you will learn from the disaster and institute measures to prevent recurrences.

Results of the debriefing should be shared by the EPT with company executives and the company's Health and Safety Committee.

Phase 4: Resumption

It is also important for the EPT to evaluate the response and recovery efforts made and begin to generate processes for prevention and/or better preparedness for future emergency situations.Once you've reacted to the disaster,the goal becomes to restore and resume business activity as soon as possible. To help accomplish this, your plan should address these four questions:

•In the case of partial or total loss of the facility, where can you set up temporary space? Is there an alternate company site that can be utilized?

• How will you restore telephone service?

• How will you replace or repair furniture and equipment?

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• How will you continue mail services?

Restoration Guidelines
The plan should include guidelines to help the Emergency Planning Team ensure that:
• Back-up systems are put in place in a timely fashion when needed;
• Systems are inspected, damage is assessed, and determinations are made regarding what is required to put those systems back into service;
• Appropriate agencies are notified (e.g., insurance, OSHA and other regulators, etc.);
• Steps to prevent furtherloss due to vandalism,theft and exposure to dangerous elements and accidents are taken; and
• Hazardous materials are removed from grounds in accordance with procedures.

Resource Management Annex
One of the most important pieces of your Contingency/Disaster Preparedness Plan is the Resource
Management Annex, a link to many services you may need to aid in your restorative efforts. The
Resource Management Annex should consist of vendors for various services, including:

personnel agencies	communication	vehicles
general materials	equipment	electrical
carpenters	plumbing	heavy equipment
first aid supplies	pumps	generators
realtors	food	furniture
office equipment	computers	flooring
security services	janitorial	HVAC
snow removal	locksmith	

The Annex should list vendor contact information and your account numbers. It’s also a good idea to
let vendors know that they’re listed in your Resource Management

Annex to help expedite your
service call when needed.

Conclusion

The objectives of a Contingency/Disaster Preparedness Plan are to protect the health and safety of
personnel, protect property and equipment, and minimize risk and liability. With proper planning and
documentation and with thorough training of employees, you will be better equipped to achieve
these objectives.