

Disaster Training or Training Disaster?

Emergency training is not “one size fits all.” The proper emergency response to a fire might be quite different than to an earthquake, a release of toxic chemicals, or the break in a 100-year-old water main that floods your street and your business. Not knowing the difference could make a bad situation much worse. You don't want to wait until a disaster happens to find out that your emergency training is ... well, a disaster. So the first step in an effective training program is to identify what types of emergencies might actually occur and determine the appropriate response for each. This may mean that you need to have more than one type of training for different possible emergencies.

Why It Matters...

- In FY 2004, OSHA gave out more than 300 citations for violations of its Emergency Action Plan rules.
- Life-threatening emergencies can happen in any workplace, so it simply makes sense to make sure employees know how to respond properly and safely.
- A comprehensive emergency response program can also help reduce legal, insurance, and recovery costs.

You need a written plan, and OSHA's guidelines are a good start. Although OSHA's standards related to emergency response provide little specific direction on what training must include, other OSHA publications have specific guidelines for emergency response training. These guidelines include the following general training points:

- Recognizing potential hazards and threats that might create an emergency
- Contents of the company's Emergency Action Plan (EAP)
- Location and use of common emergency response equipment, such as alarms
- Individual roles and responsibilities
- Warning, alarm, and communication procedures and systems
- Evacuation and shelter procedures
- Reporting and accountability procedures (that is, making sure everyone is accounted for in an emergency)
- Equipment shutdown procedures

Because fast response is critical in an emergency, practical exercises and drills should be considered essential to effective emergency training. And remember that employees with specific emergency response duties must receive additional, specialized training.

Don't forget to update emergency training. OSHA also provides guidelines on when to provide emergency training. Clearly, it's not enough simply to train once and forget about it. OSHA encourages emergency training:

- Immediately after developing an EAP
- After revisions to the EAP
- For all new employees
- For employees with new responsibilities or assignments
- When new equipment, materials, or processes are introduced
- When exercises and drills show unsatisfactory performance
- In any event, at least annually

Don Dressler Consulting can provide you with all the necessary compliance analysis and tools to develop your emergency preparedness action plan and train your employees. The basic level of action on your part would be to just do what is needed for OSHA compliance. A better step would be to plan how to resume your business quickly and profitably after a disaster. Best practice would be to actively work with your customers to make disaster preparedness a market advantage in helping them recover from a disaster as well.

Contact Don Dressler: Ph: 949-533-3742 or E-Mail: info@dondressler.com for more information and to get started on your plans.