Be prepared for an emergency situation

Would you know what to do if you were working outside when a severe storm hit or if a chemical spill blocked your emergency exit route? A variety of emergency situations can strike at any time in the workplace and you must be prepared.

Everyone is involved during an emergency situation. You and your coworkers must know the provisions in your facility’s emergency plans so you are able to take the right actions in case of an emergency.

A workplace emergency is a sudden and unexpected adverse situation that threatens the health and/or safety of employees and that requires urgent and immediate action to minimize the danger. When there’s an emergency, taking the proper response actions saves lives.

Types of emergencies
Emergencies may be natural or manmade and can include the following:

- Floods;
- Hurricanes;
- Tornadoes;
- Fires;
- Gas releases;
- Chemical spills;
- Radiological accidents;
- Explosions;
- Injuries or sudden illness;
- Civil disturbances; and
- Workplace violence incidents.

Your company’s Emergency Action Plan (EAP) will describe proper response actions for each type of emergency.

An EAP covers designated actions employers and employees must take to ensure employee safety during a fire or other emergency.

You should be familiar with:

- How to report fires, hazardous chemical spills, and other emergencies;
- The route you are assigned to take during a building evacuation; and
- Who to ask for more information.

What you should know to be prepared:

- Know potential hazards.
Some of the hazards you may encounter can be found in the chemicals you may use every day. The safety data sheet (SDS) is one of your best sources of information on the chemicals used in your area. Your company’s emergency response

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team needs to have SDSs at hand before responding to a spill.

- **Become familiar with alarm systems.** Most employers use alarm systems to tell employees that they should evacuate an area or take a specific action. You must be able to recognize these alarms. In areas where production noise could prevent an alarm from being heard, flashing lights are often installed as a second, visual alarm. These alarm systems often have auxiliary power sources so that they can operate even when the power goes out. Alarms signal danger in the facility. Never assume that it is “just another drill.”

- **Know about spill equipment.** Your company’s response team knows where the emergency equipment is and how to use it.

- **Know the location of fire extinguishers.** Many chemicals are flammable or create a flammable product when mixed. In most cases of fire, you should get yourself and others out of the work area quickly and call for help. Trained employees use an appropriate fire extinguisher only if the fire is contained and is not rapidly spreading.

- **Know the location of emergency exits.** Make sure you know how to get out of your work area or the building quickly if necessary. Keep aisles clear so that you and co-workers are not endangered. You need to know which exit routes to use from any area of the facility where you could be working. Be aware of your company’s head count location and go directly there if you can safely do so. Know if there are hazardous areas in the building that should be avoided as you exit.

- **Know first aid or where to get it.** Know the general first aid rules and what the SDSs say about first aid for the particular substances you work with.

### Emergencies must be reported

There are a variety of ways to report an emergency. The appropriate method depends on your facility’s EAP and the situation. For example, many employers want all fires to be reported by using pull alarms. When you’re expected to use telephones to report emergencies, the emergency numbers must be posted nearby.

### Evacuation procedures

An emergency evacuation can be done quickly, efficiently, and safely when everyone knows and follows instructions. In some cases, total and immediate evacuation of all employees is necessary. In other emergencies, a partial evacuation may be appropriate.

Some situations would call for employees to assemble in a safe area within the building. Know what is expected of you in all possible emergencies.

Your EAP will indicate safe areas for you to assemble after an evacuation. When you evacuate, move away from the building’s exit doors and report to the assembly area. Once in the assembly area, cooperate with the people who are taking attendance. Remain alert for further instructions, and don’t leave the assembly area without permission.

### Employees with specialized duties

Some employees are trained to help with the evacuation process. Always follow the directions of these “evacuation wardens.”

Certain employees may have training and authorization to remain behind to operate critical plant operations before they evacuate. Some employees may have been trained and equipped to provide rescue. Others may have been trained to provide first aid and medical assistance.

If you are not one of these employees, do not attempt to perform any of these functions. You are more helpful when you follow instructions and report injuries, etc. to the people who are trained to help.

### Rescues and medical assistance

Be sure to learn your company’s approach to rescues and medical assistance. It takes more than just willing hands to save lives. Untrained individuals may endanger themselves and those they are trying to rescue. For this reason, leave rescue work to those who are trained and equipped to conduct rescues.

### Staying safe

An evacuation drill gives you practical experience in how to respond to an emergency. Be sure to participate in training and follow all your companies procedures. Performing drills will also help your company identify the EAP’s strengths and weaknesses.

Preparation and practice are your best defense from being injured during an emergency situation. Make sure to learn your company’s procedures so you and your coworkers can stay safe.
Safety Focus: CPR

Did you know that you have less than 5 minutes to intervene successfully when an individual suffers a cardiac arrest? Nearly 400,000 Americans suffer out-of-hospital cardiac arrests every year, and almost 90 percent die because they don’t receive immediate Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation, or CPR, from someone on the scene. When begun immediately, CPR can double or triple a person’s chance of survival. This is one of the primary reasons the American Heart Association (AHA) has established guidelines for CPR.

For the past 40 years, CPR guidelines have trained people to follow these simple A-B-C instructions:

1. Open the airway by tilting the victim’s head back.
2. Provide breaths by pinching the victim’s nose and doing a succession of breaths into his/her mouth.
3. Perform chest compressions.

**Hands-Only™ CPR**

The AHA now is teaching people how to save lives with Hands-Only™ CPR. This type of CPR focuses on chest compressions only. This technique helps oxygen-rich blood circulate throughout the body sooner, critical for people who experience sudden cardiac arrest. This technique is also much easier to perform so even nontrained individuals can provide assistance.

There are a few things to do before you start chest compressions. Check to see:

- That the area is safe to enter and perform CPR.
- If the person conscious or unconscious.
- If the person appears unconscious. Tap or shake his or her shoulder and ask loudly, “Are you OK?” If the person doesn’t respond, lay the person down on a flat surface. If two people are available, one should call 911 or the local emergency number and one should begin CPR. If you are alone and have a phone handy, call 911 before beginning CPR. If an automated external defibrillator (AED) is immediately available, deliver one shock if instructed by the device, then begin CPR.

**Stayin’ Alive**

The tempo of the 1970’s Bee Gees’ classic hit, “Stayin’ Alive,” happens to be the near-perfect rate for doing chest compressions during CPR. The song is a centerpiece of the AHA national awareness campaign to teach people how to save lives with Hands-Only™ CPR. If a teen or adult suddenly collapses, follow these two steps:

1. Call 9-1-1.
2. Position yourself directly over the victim and place the heel of one hand in the center of the chest. Then, put your other hand on top of the first, interlocking the fingers. Push hard and fast at the rate of 100 beats per minute, about the same tempo as “Stayin’ Alive,” until help arrives.

Children and infants require a different technique. Go to www.heart.org for more information about training on CPR for younger individuals.

**True or False?**

1. **I might make a mistake.** False. According to the AHA, there is almost nothing you can do during CPR to harm a person in cardiac arrest except to delay your response.
2. **Chest compressions might not help.** False. The AHA asserts that people having a heart attack still have oxygen remaining in their lungs and bloodstream. Starting chest compressions delivers needed oxygen until medical help arrives.
3. **Only older, overweight men are at risk for a heart attack.** False. Equal numbers of men and women have heart attacks.
4. **The majority of all cardiac emergencies occur at work.** False. The AHA says that 90 percent of cardiac arrest events occur at home. This means that you will most likely perform CPR on a family member.

Anyone can learn to do CPR. Information on AHA Hands-Only CPR is available at: www.heart.org/HandsOnlyCPR, or www.youtube.com/HandsOnlyCPR.
Physical activity doesn’t have to mean joining a gym or walking on a treadmill. To find an exercise routine that you can stick with, find an enjoyable activity that fits into your lifestyle.

When looking for activities, consider:

- Do you prefer exercising alone, with a friend, or in a group? If you’re self-motivated, solo exercises such as swimming might be for you. Running can be done alone or with a friend. Fitness classes and team sports are great ways to add a social component to exercise. For variety, try a mixture of options.

- What types of activities are best suited to your lifestyle? Consider your amount of free time, physical abilities, and budget. Walking is one of the most inexpensive exercise options – a good pair of shoes is all that’s needed.

- What activities did you enjoy as a child? Basketball, biking, or swimming may be activities you can take up again.

- Do you prefer being indoors or outside? Hiking and biking are great options for those who love the outdoors. Gyms offer exercise equipment options and numerous classes for those who prefer indoor activity.

- What time of day is best? A morning person might want to get up 30 minutes earlier than usual to exercise, while a night owl might prefer to stop at the gym right after work.

- How about making it a family affair? Walking the dog, taking a bike ride as a family, tossing a ball with the kids, or playing an active video game are a few ways to incorporate activity into your day.

- What are your health and fitness goals? Are you trying to lose weight or lower your cholesterol? Talk to your doctor or a health coach to determine the best way to meet your goals.