

Disaster Preparedness for Businesses - Emergency Response



Why is this important?

- Businesses employ *people*. Although much of business preparedness and recovery is financial in scope and impact, some steps directly affect employee safety.
- Prompt response during an emergency, enhanced by workplace drills, can save lives and minimize downtime.
- Effective response and evacuation plans, along with trained employees, make public safety (fire, police, EMS) responses more effective, enhance response personnel safety, and minimize disruption during response.

Seven habits of highly effective workplace emergency responses

1. Ensure TVF&R has *current* versions of the following. Include temporary updates (e.g., significant changes in hazardous inventory, transitional procedures, renovations, detours related to construction or repairs).
 - **24-hour emergency contacts:** *onsite during all hours that work is in progress, on call during off-hours.* Designated contacts should have ready access to the following items and be able to provide information to responders regarding onsite hazards and personnel accountability. Contacts should be notified as soon as a TVF&R is requested; ideally they should be able to meet incoming responders at a specified location outside hazard zones
 - **Keys and/or keypad combinations**, preferably in a controlled-access keybox at the entrance
 - **Building plans**, including layout, mechanical systems, fire protection systems and alarm panels, alarm and sprinkler system maintenance contacts, emergency egress, and evacuation areas
 - **Hazardous materials inventories**, including substance identification, amounts, locations, and safety/control features
 - **Any other onsite hazard inventories** (e.g., high- or low-pressure systems, thermal hazards, noise hazards), along with emergency control features (e.g., shutoffs)
 - **A copy of your internal emergency response plan**
2. Ensure that all employees are familiar with emergency response plans and are familiar with their specific emergency roles and responsibilities. Have periodic training and drills. Participate in regional emergency response exercises.
3. If your onsite hazards are significant or you have a large or complex facility, train your response personnel in the Incident Command System. This will allow internal and external responders to be working within the same incident management framework. Establish an onsite command post or ensure that internal command staff report to TVF&R's command post when it is established.
4. Invite TVF&R to observe and participate in emergency response drills. This will help familiarize responders with site layout, hazards, personnel, staging areas, etc. *There is no substitute for face-to-face coordination before an incident occurs.*
5. Develop and practice an onsite system for evacuation and rapid and accurate accounting for all personnel during an emergency; this should include an "all-clear" signal *without which employees do not re-enter*. This allows employees needing immediate assistance to receive it and can prevent unnecessary rescue attempts.
6. Keep emergency vehicle routes and access to fire protection equipment (sprinkler systems, fire department connections) clear and well marked.
7. Establish protocols for managing information release to the media on short notice. Have at least one employee available onsite (on-call during off-hours) who can respond to media requests and work with TVF&R public information officers to provide accurate, appropriate information during emergencies.

For further information...

- Tualatin Valley Fire & Rescue: <http://www.tvfr.com>
- Your insurance agent
- Regulatory agencies as applicable (e.g., OR-OSHA, DEQ, EPA)
- Federal Emergency Management Agency: <http://www.fema.gov/business/guide/index.shtm>
- Institute for Business and Home Safety: <http://www.disastersafety.org/>
- American Red Cross workplace preparedness: <http://www.redcross.org/www-files/Documents/pdf/Preparedness/PrepYourBusfortheUnthinkable.pdf>