

EMERGENCY ACTION PLAN

Prevention is not always possible so preparation is always a necessity. We are speaking of disasters, such as fires, explosions, chemical spills, earthquakes, tornados and floods. In fact, you must be prepared. The **OSHA Means of Egress standard (1910, Subpart E)** requires employers to prepare workers to evacuate safely in the event of an emergency. Establishing an Emergency Action Plan (EAP) is key to compliance. Here's an overview of how to do it.

WHEN IS AN EAP REQUIRED?

Under Sec. 1910.38, an employer must implement an EAP if:

- It's required to provide fire extinguishers and
- Workers are expected to evacuate the workplace in case of a fire or other emergency

This covers just about all workplaces. Organizations not covered are those that have an in-house fire brigade in which every worker is trained and equipped to fight fires, and consequently, no one is expected to evacuate.

WHAT THE EAP MUST INCLUDE

The EAP must:

- Be in writing
- Be kept in the workplace
- Be available for employees to review
- Include at least the following elements
 - Procedures for reporting a fire or other emergency
 - Emergency evacuation procedures, including evacuation type and exit route assignments
 - Procedures for employees with disabilities and who require help evacuating
 - Procedures for employees who remain behind to operate critical plant operations before they evacuate
 - Procedures to account for all employees after evacuation
 - Procedures to be followed by employees performing rescue or medical duties
 - The name and job title of every employee who may be contacted by employees who need more information about the plan or an explanation of their duties under the plan



- Maintain an employee alarm system that uses a distinctive signal for each purpose
- Designate and train employees to assist other employees to evacuate safely and in an orderly manner

WHEN MUST THE EAP BE REVIEWED?

Review the EAP with each employee covered by the plan when you first develop the plan or when the employee is initially assigned to a job to do under or affected by the EAP. Reviewing the EAP is also required whenever the employee's responsibilities under the EAP change or the EAP itself changes.

WHAT TRAINING IS REQUIRED?

The EAP standard also includes training requirements. Employees designated to use firefighting equipment under the EAP must be trained in the appropriate use of the equipment upon initial assignment of that responsibility and at least once a year after that.

EAP BEST PRACTICES

OSHA has also issued guidance to help employers comply with the EAP requirements. They include:

- Designating one individual for every 20 employees to act as an evacuation warden to help with the evacuation and ensure everybody is accounted for before evacuating themselves
- Attaching to your EAP floor plans or workplace maps showing evacuation routes
- Identifying and describing in the EAP the refuge or safe area to which employees are supposed to evacuate
- Coordinating your EAP with those of other companies in the same building, and/or adopt a standard EAP for the entire building

A well written, planned and practiced EAP has saved many lives. Prepare it well, and hope you never have to use it. But if you do...you'll be ready.

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