Workplace Emergency Program

Contents

Handling Emergency Situations In Your Workplace

Introduction

- One of your employees trips on the stairs and falls. One arm is broken and there may be a back injury. The employee is unconscious.

- Your forklift operator is moving a 55-gallon drum of volatile acid into the workplace. In the process the drum is ruptured and 40 gallons spill onto the floor.

- An employee operating a degreaser accidentally drops in some metal pieces that are hot from machining. The degreasing agent splashes, erupting into flames and spreading fire in one corner of the building.

Imagine right now one of these incidents occurs. Look at your watch and count down three minutes. What happens in the next three minutes will be critical in determining the outcome of the emergency. Do your employees have enough training in medical procedures to care for an injured employee without inflicting additional damage? How your employees respond to medical emergencies may permanently affect someone's life.

In your countdown one minute has gone by. Have you or any other managers been notified of a problem yet? What are your employees doing to shut down equipment, stop the spread of fire on chemicals in the plant, or protect themselves from further exposure to a hazardous situation? Now two minutes have gone by. Is there a need for outside assistance such as an ambulance or the fire department? If so, have they been notified and are employees taking proper steps in the interim to contain the situation or protect themselves?

Now three minutes have elapsed. How is the unconscious employee with the broken arm and possible back injury? Have untrained employees moving the individual made the injury worse? When the acid spilled, did employees know to put on proper respiratory protection before attempting to clean up the spill? Or do you now have four employees with severe respiratory distress due to an overexposure to acid gases? What about the fire? Has it been put out, or has it spread to the rest of the building? Are any employees trapped? Is the fire department on its way?

Without your direct involvement during an emergency, what happens? Can production resume with minimal overall interruption? Are you out of business or facing a situation of catastrophic proportions? The answer to these questions depends on how well you anticipate the types of emergencies that can arise in your workplace; how well you plan proper steps to handle the emergency; and how well you train your employees in the steps to be taken.

Keys to Success

Anticipating Emergencies

The first step in handling emergencies is to anticipate what types of emergencies could arise at your workplace. The potential emergencies and their chances of occurring depend on your work environment and the operations and processes at your facility. A safety and health survey will help you identify the hazards specific to your workplace. Once the hazards have been identified, plans and procedures can be developed and implemented to eliminate or control these hazards. However, even with these preventative measures, you are gambling to assume that an emergency situation will never arise in your facility. Identify emergencies that could conceivably happen, and then begin to make plans for the swiftest possible control of each.

Planning for Emergencies

There are five major issues to consider when planning responses to emergencies. These issues should be considered in relation to each other, particularly when deciding whether to address them in a sequential order, whether they require simultaneous attention, or if some issues need not be addressed at all.

Remember, as you address each issue to keep in mind the specific factors involved in your workplace and tailor your plan accordingly.

Notification (Emergency Alert)

You need to design a system so that any employee who notices an emergency situation can notify you or other management personnel. Even though your staff may be involved in containing a hazard or removing employees from exposure, you need to be made aware of potential problems as early as possible. Based on the possible emergencies identified in the hazard assessment of your facility, you will need to determine where visible and audible alarms should be placed and at what point you should be called. Obviously you would not want to have employees alerting management every time a minor problem arises, but you should be made aware of a potential emergency immediately.

The employer should explain to each employee the preferred means of reporting emergencies, such as manual pull box alarms, public address systems, radios, or telephones. The employer should post emergency telephone numbers near telephones, on bulletin boards, and at other appropriate locations. When a communication system also serves as the employee alarm system, all emergency messages should have priority over all non-emergency messages.

Limit Employee Exposure

Depending on the type of emergency, you may need to limit both the number of employees exposed and the extent of exposure. Is partial or total evacuation of the building, or the use of appropriate personal protective equipment necessary? You must focus your emergency response efforts on limiting employee exposure to the hazard. This includes protecting employees who may be exposed to a hazard while trying to assist in the emergency (i.e., putting out a fire, rescuing a worker, cleaning up a chemical spill, etc.).

Hazard Control, and Equipment and/or Process Shutdown

In planning for hazard control, first consider any regulations that specify required actions for fire control, lockout/tagout, evacuation, etc.

Depending on the type of emergency or hazard, you may determine that your employees can take action to control the hazard without endangering themselves. For example, employees who have received fire extinguisher training may be able to extinguish a fire in the early stages, thereby removing the hazard. In some instances, you would need outside assistance. In some emergencies, employees may only be able to contain the hazard until outside help arrives, or until subsequent actions can be taken to control or remove the hazard. In the case of chemical exposure emergencies, specific actions are necessary to contain spills and prevent employee exposure. chemical exposure emergencies, specific actions are necessary to contain spills and prevent employee exposure.

You may need to provide a procedure for shutting off equipment or shutting down work processes, either at their locations or by remote control. The reason for such a shutdown might be to make it easier or safer for hazard control (such as in fire fighting efforts) or to prevent other hazards from appearing (such as problems that might occur when machines are still running during a gas leak).

Medical Treatment

Occasionally an accident will happen which requires emergency medical treatment. The extent of medical care that can be provided onsite will depend on the training of your staff. It may be a good idea to provide them with general first aid or CPR training, or prepare them to respond to injuries or illnesses that could occur from the specific conditions in your facility. Even with comprehensive treatment available offsite in an industrial clinic or hospital, your staff could still be trained to give initial treatment to stabilize victims and prepare them for transport. It is important to identify the nearest emergency resource and the actual response time to your facility as well as the response time for backup providers.

Cleanup and Startup Operations

Occasionally a need for workplace cleanup operations develops after a hazard is brought under control and before normal operations can resume. In the event of a chemical spill, for example, the chemical needs to be cleaned up and disposed of properly. A little thought before these cleanup operations begin can prevent additional employee exposure to the same or different hazards. Try to anticipate these needs and design protective measures for employees in advance.

The same reasoning applies to startup operations. The process of starting up equipment or production can create hazards in addition to the problem that led to the shutdown. You need to carefully think through the startup procedures to make sure that no problems will arise that will make the operations unsafe for your employees.

Training Employees

All of your work to anticipate emergencies and plan appropriate responses won't help unless you train your supervisors and employees to carry out your plans. This is the essence of training: to let people know what they need to accomplish and what you expect from each of them. You may need to do initial training on the hazards you anticipate and the response procedures you have planned. A second phase may be needed to develop the specific skills and capabilities your employees may need to carry out those procedures and then

Your emergency procedures will be more effective if you delegate certain tasks or responsibilities to individual employees and train them in these areas. For example, you designate one or more persons in each department or section to be responsible for notifying management of potential emergencies or for telephoning the fire department. Your decision on this assignment of responsibilities will depend on the organization of your company and the capabilities of your employees.

Summary

Being prepared for workplace emergencies involves three key steps:

- Anticipate what might happen

- Plan what you will do in response to an emergency

- Train your employees so they know what to do

Thorough preparation for emergencies includes developing a plan for each type of emergency that could arise in your workplace. These emergencies might be a fire emergency, a medical emergency, or one that could result from the materials or equipment used in your business. Remember, that once an emergency occurs, it's too late to stop and plan. Thorough and careful advance planning is the key to managing emergencies.

Worksheet

The following worksheet is a series of questions that will help you anticipate fire, medical, or other emergencies. Once these emergencies have been identified you can plan appropriate responses. The worksheet is meant to be a general guideline for any type of workplace, and should be tailored to your own needs

Fire

Every facility should be prepared for the possibility of a fire. Although fires can start from many causes, you can determine the most probable causes of fire and where fires are most likely to start in your workplace by answering the following questions:

1. What kinds of flammable or explosive materials are in your workplace? Make a list of these materials. Remember to include items such as flammable liquids and major electrical components as well as those items normally thought of, such as paper or wood.

2. Where, and in what quantities, are these materials located On the list of flammable or explosive materials identify areas of the workplace that contain concentrations of these materials. It may be helpful to mark these areas and materials on a floor plan, or make a second list that describes each area of the workplace and the materials it contains.

3. What major sources of ignition are in your workplace? How far are they from where the flammable or explosive materials are located? Have you taken action to control these under normal circumstances?

4. Do you have any chemicals or hazardous materials that would pose special problems during a fire? For example, will any materials tend to explode if ignited or heated, or will they release toxic gases, vapors or particles that require

personal protective equipment? Do you have any radioactive material? List these materials separately, along with specific information on the type of hazard involved and conditions under which a problem would occur. For example, at what temperature will the materials become explosive?

Medical and First Aid

As with fire emergencies, you need to anticipate and prepare for general first aid and medical needs. Some workplaces can also have special needs for medical care. Answers to the following questions can help you determine what you need:

1. Do you employ anyone who has an existing medical problem that may require special care? For example, someone with epilepsy, hemophilia, or heart disease? Although as an employer you may not be aware of existing conditions such as these, and discrimination against such workers is prohibited, you can explain to workers why you desire such medical information, and then ask them to let you know of any relevant medical problems.

2. Do you have any chemicals or hazardous materials or processes in your facility that would create medical problems? Make a list of chemicals and materials used and the accompanying health effects which could result from exposure. Information from chemical manufacturers or Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDSs) that describe various substances and how to use them safely will help you.

3. Collaborate with your emergency resources in identifying potential problems and exposures at your workplace.

Specific Emergencies in Your Workplace

In addition to fire and medical emergencies, you may have processes or materials in your facility that can present very specific hazards. The flowing questions are designed to identify those hazards:

1. What type of accident or emergency could result if employees failed to follow established site-specific safe work procedures or rules? Look at each rule, guideline, and practice that you have implemented. If any or all employees failed to follow directions, list the possible outcomes. Are any special outcomes identified beyond a fire or accident requiring first aid? If so, list those.

2. Do you have any chemicals, materials, or processes in your workplace that could lead to other types of emergency situations? For example, do you have any radioactive materials, or chemicals, that are hazardous if accidentally mixed together, such as acid and cyanide? Or do you have any processes that could cause explosions, release of chemicals, etc.? To identify these hazards you should look at manufacturers' directions, specifications, and information on Material Safety Data Sheets.

By answering all of the above questions as completely and thoroughly as possible, you should now have a list of hazards specific to your workplace that could cause an emergency. You can now use it as a basis for planning your response to each kind of emergency you have identified and to train your employees to respond properly. This information should also be provided to emergency assistance personnel such a fire fighters and/or hospital staff.

A System For Employees to Report Hazardous Conditions

Introduction

Employees play a key role in helping to identify and control hazards that may occur or already exist in the workplace. A reliable system for employees to report these conditions is an important aspect of an effective safety and health program.

Since your organization is unique, you will need to develop a method for employees to report known hazards, potential hazards, or hazardous conditions that are consistent with the policies and procedures of your company. If no system for reporting these hazards exists, then the simplest and most practical method would involve the employee's first-line supervisor, or the person to whom the employee reports. This key person plays an important role in making the system work. It also involves the person (or perhaps several persons) in the organization who mitigates the hazard, or makes sure corrective measures are taken.

Keys to Success

Policy on Notification

The first step in developing a successful notification system is to establish a policy about employee involvement in the program. You have already made a commitment toward establishing an effective safety and health program that includes a safety policy, objectives, defined responsibilities, and commitment of resources. Now it is time to get your employees involved. Tell them any hazards that they observe or suspect must be reported to their supervisor. You will want to make it clear that the safety of the workplace depends on their reports, and they have nothing to fear from reporting a hazard. Put your policy in writing, read it to your employees (or have their supervisor do so), and give them a copy to reinforce the policy. Provide your supervisors with instructions on how they should implement this new policy in the workplace and work toward full employee involvement.

Hazard Reports

1. While most small businesses will find that a verbal reporting system works well, you may want to develop a form for employees to notify you or their supervisors of hazardous conditions. This type of form serves as a record of the notification, and also protects the employee who may want to file an anonymous report. Include on the form space to report the time and date, the location of the hazard, and a description of the problem. You may want to ask the employee's recommended corrective actions.

2. The other procedure would be for employees to file verbal reports, and then the supervisor would complete a written hazard report. The supervisor's report would also describe the hazard and indicate the action taken or the action planned to correct or eliminate the hazard. You could combine these two forms into one, as illustrated on the worksheet. In order for your notification system to work, you must take all hazard reports seriously. Remember, that it is a hazard to the employee who reports it, even if it is not a hazard to the supervisor or to you.

Take Action

After a hazard has been reported, you will want to assess whether it actually exists, and determine what it means in light of your workplace operations. Decide what must be done to correct the hazard, and how to protect employees until the hazard is corrected. You will set a priority on when you can eliminate the hazard based on your available resources (time, money, manpower, etc.) and other commitments. If the hazard cannot be corrected immediately, develop an action plan on how you will eliminate it. Part of this action plan includes a report back to the employee to let him or her know your assessment and what you are going to do about it. This lets your employees know that their reports are taken seriously.

Follow-up

After you have carried out your action plan and eliminated the hazard, or when some action has been taken to educate the employee about why the condition was not considered hazardous, you will want to follow up on the action taken. You or your supervisor need to check to make sure that the corrective action worked and continues to work. Documentation of their (the supervisor's) action assures you that the necessary steps were taken to provide your employees with the protection they need. Also, this documentation helps to develop a history of your operations that can be reviewed by new supervisors and can be used as topics in safety discussions or training sessions to help ensure that the hazard does not recur.

Summary

Remember these important points:

· Develop a practical way for the employee to report the hazard directly.

· Insist on a written report from the supervisor about the condition.

· Evaluate the hazard report and assign it a priority.

· Develop an action plan.

· Implement the plan, making sure that you let the employee know what action you have taken.

· Follow-up or review the effectiveness of the action taken.

· Document the action taken for future use.

Worksheet

An effective employee notification system is usually very simple. It consists of letting your employees know how to report hazards and why it is important to do so. Develop a hazard reporting policy statement and short forms to report the hazards and document the action taken. This worksheet provides examples of these forms to give you an idea of what might work well in your business.

Policy on Reporting Hazards

Your safety and well-being are extremely important to me. To make sure that all potential hazards are eliminated before anyone becomes sick or injured while at work, I have established a (new) policy.

Anyone who suspects that a hazard exists, or who notices any unsafe work practices, shall report it to _____ _____immediately.

(Supervisor)

Evaluation of this report will be made and you will be notified about the action taken to eliminate the condition.

Employee Report of Hazardous Conditions

Employee _____

Department _____

Date_____ Time _____

Hazard_____

Suggestion_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Employee complete and give to supervisor

Supervisor_____

Department _____

Date_____

Action taken _____

Supervisor complete and give to manager

Date_____

Manager _____

Review/Comments _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Signature of Manager

Follow-up Documentation

Hazard_____
_____
_____

Exposure_____Frequency_____Duration _____
_____
_____

Interim protection provided _____
_____
_____

Corrective action taken_____
_____
_____

Required time for corrective action _____

Cost of hazard elimination _____

Retraining provided_____Follow-up date_____

Additional action taken_____
_____
_____

_____

Signature of Manager/Supervisor

_____

Date