



NEWSLETTER

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EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS – VITAL TO ALL ORGANIZATIONS

The old saying goes that the best way to deal with an emergency is to prepare for one. This applies to all sizes and types of organizations — small, medium or large, private or public sector. How organizations prepare for emergencies will depend largely on such things as each organization's initial [vulnerability assessment](#), the industry they're in, the type of business they run, where they're located, available local emergency measures services (EMS) and the specific nature of the work undertaken.

Emergencies can flow from both man-made and natural incidents (disasters). For the purposes of this newsletter, an emergency is defined as an abnormal situation that requires prompt action, beyond normal procedures, in order to limit damage to persons, property or the environment and to assist in business continuity. Today, emergencies cover a broad spectrum of possible situations, including:

- ☞ Fires/explosions
- ☞ Hazardous materials incidents
- ☞ Medical emergencies
- ☞ Power outages
- ☞ Criminal activities, including armed assault, chemical, biological and bomb threats
- ☞ Civil disturbances
- ☞ Radiological accidents
- ☞ Severe weather (hurricane, tornado, winter storm)
- ☞ Floods or flash floods
- ☞ Earthquakes

Why is it so important for organizations to adequately prepare for emergencies? Take the example of one of the deadliest emergencies in U.S. history, the attack on New York's twin towers on 9/11.

*... the tally wasn't as grim as it might have been. When terrorists had bombed the parking garage of the Trade Center in 1993, it had taken **four hours** to evacuate the buildings. This time (2001), because of improved stairway lighting, repeated fire drills, and other measures, it had taken **forty minutes**. As a result, and with the help of the police and firefighters who rushed in, almost all of those working in the towers below where the planes had hit had escaped. ...¹*

However, according to a 2011 poll by the [Society for Human Resource Management](#), since 9/11 only one-third of American companies report feeling well prepared for a potential threat or disaster.² Since 9/11, a 2008 Canadian Senate report noted that Canada is still not sufficiently prepared to cope with serious national emergencies, from natural disasters to terrorist attacks.³

Today, most jurisdictions in Canada and the U.S. require that employers have emergency response plans. Standards have been developed to guide organizations in their planning. In the U.S., [Occupational Safety & Health Administration](#) Standard [Part 1910.38](#) (emergency action plans) requires

¹ *After: How America Confronted the September 12 Era*: Steven Brill (Simon & Schuster, New York, N.Y., 2003) pp. 35-36

² *Report - Preparedness Lacking for Many Firms as Sept. 11 Anniversary Nears*: Rita Pyrellis, Workforce Week, September 6, 2011, Vol. 12 Issue 34

³ *Canada ill-prepared for disaster*: Linda Nguyen, Canwest News Service, September 02, 2008

employers to have oral or written emergency action plans in their workplaces. In 2008, the [Canadian Standards Association](#) (CSA) launched the new standard [Z1600-08 - Emergency management and business continuity programs](#). The new CSA Z1600 is based on the U.S. [NFPA 1600 Standard on Disaster/Emergency Management and Business Continuity Programs](#), a [National Fire Protection Association](#) (NFPA) document that had been used by Canadian businesses in the past. Both standards currently provide a framework for organizations to help them plan and prepare for an emergency and ensure business continuity.

What is meant by an 'emergency response plan'?

An emergency response plan covers the designated actions that emergency wardens, supervisors, staff and others must take to ensure employee safety from potential emergencies. The three basic principles that need to be addressed in emergency response preparation are [planning, implementation and evaluation](#). Few people can think clearly and logically in an emergency or crisis, so it is important to do so in advance, when one has time to be thorough.

When developing an emergency response plan, it's a good idea to look at a wide variety of potential emergencies that could occur in the workplace. It should be tailored to each worksite and include information about all potential sources of emergencies. Developing an emergency response plan requires an organization to first do a vulnerability assessment. The assessment will determine what, if any, hazards exist in work sites or in the vicinity of work sites that could cause an emergency. Security and critical infrastructure considerations will also have to be taken into account. If there is more than one worksite, each site should have a dedicated emergency response plan.

No matter what kind of operation, most organizations today could potentially face emergencies involving hazardous materials such as flammable, explosive, toxic, noxious, corrosive, biological, oxidizable, or radioactive substances. The source of the hazardous materials could be external, such as a local chemical plant that catches on fire, a possible freight train derailment, or an oil truck that overturns on a nearby freeway. In light of the relative vicinity of external sources, there could also be further helpful information available for use by the organization via local authorities who may already have a disaster/emergency plan in place.

In addition, sources of hazardous materials may be internal to a physical plant, the parking garage, a laboratory, a warehouse, a printing bureau, storage rooms, etc. Regardless of the source, potential exposures most likely will have a direct impact on employees and operations and should be addressed in the emergency response plan. In addition, as part of worksite assessments, organizations must determine for immediate emergency response by onsite personnel their needs for special equipment, such as visual identifiers, loudspeakers, communications gear, flashlights, personal protective equipment (e.g. hard hats, proper respirators, chemical suits, goggles).

Under occupational health and safety legislation, employers are required to provide first aid treatment for employees and to train first-aid attendants for the workplace. If first aid facilities are available near the worksite, access arrangements for them must be made to handle emergency cases. Employees should also be provided with written emergency medical procedures, including those related to hazardous materials exposure (e.g. materials safety data sheets), to facilitate first aid treatment.

How does one go about doing what needs to be done?

If a proper vulnerability assessment is performed as an integral part of organizational risk management, putting together a comprehensive and effective emergency response plan that deals with all types of issues specific to each worksite becomes less difficult. Importantly, senior management must actively and visibly support emergency response preparation and implementation.

"Healthier organizations mean more productive employees."

It is strongly recommended that organizations establish an emergency response organizations (ERO) with management, staff (e.g. security, health and safety, or emergency officers) and non-management representation. The EROs should be given full responsibility to carry out the vulnerability assessment, the plan's implementation and its continuous assessment in order to improve the plan and its execution. While being ultimately accountable to senior management for emergency preparedness, the EROs must be given full authority to declare an emergency and test emergency procedures when needed as part of risk management policies or as required under law.

The best emergency response plans include employees in the preparation process, specify what employees should do during an emergency, and ensure that both emergency wardens and employees receive proper training and instructions for emergencies. By including all employees in its preparation, employees are encouraged to offer suggestions about potential hazards, worst-case scenarios, and proper emergency responses. After the plan is developed and implemented, it should be reviewed with employees to make sure everyone knows what to do before, during and after an emergency.

From employment orientation and on, employees should be informed (e.g. written manuals) about the types of emergencies that may occur and be trained in the proper course of action. The size of a workplace and workforce, processes used, materials handled, and the availability of onsite or outside resources will influence training requirements. Employees need to understand the function and elements of EROs and the emergency response plan, including types of potential emergencies, reporting procedures, alarm systems, evacuation and lockdown/total shutdown procedures.

Just as a business changes day-to-day, so should an emergency preparedness. Drills and exercises will help the ERO and employees to prepare. How often an organization needs to practise the emergency response plan will depend on the results of the vulnerability assessment and the nature of emergency procedures. An organization should conduct regularly scheduled education and training seminars to provide employees with information, identify needs and develop preparedness skills. Emergency response training should be included in new employee orientation programs.

Accommodation of persons with disabilities in emergency planning.

Since 2006, 1.85 million people in Ontario (Canada) have a disability. That's about 15.5 percent of the population – and growing.⁴ Disabilities can include everything from persons with physical or mental disabilities, health issues such as heart conditions, hearing loss, obesity, etc. Worker impairment due to disability may affect mobility, vision, hearing, speech, or cognitive functioning on a permanent as well as a temporary basis, such as during recovery from an incident.⁵ Accommodation planning must ensure that equipment, emergency procedures and training respond to staff and individuals' needs.

As part of the vulnerability assessment, organizations need to examine any additional risks, equipment and training associated with having persons with disabilities on the premises. Normally, laws, such those pertaining to occupational health and safety, contain no specific emergency preparedness provisions regarding workers with a disability. However, 'general duty' provisions legally require employers to take every precaution reasonable in the circumstances for the protection of a worker. This would include ensuring that workers with a disability can safely evacuate the workplace or safely participate in other emergency procedures such as lockdowns.

How does an organization ensure that it's emergency planning is adequate?

To recap, it is important that organizations ensure the adequacy of emergency planning by:

⁴ *Emergency Preparedness: new rules if you employ people with disabilities: Karin Micheelsen, and Scott Williams, Health & Safety Ontario Network Magazine, Volume 1, Issue 2 – November 2011*

⁵ Ibid

“Healthier organizations mean more productive employees.”

- ☞ Supporting the work of the authorized emergency response organization (ERO).
- ☞ Verifying applicable legislated requirements for emergency planning (e.g. occupational health and safety laws, public safety laws, municipal bylaws, fire codes, building codes, etc.)
- ☞ Ensuring that all staff are adequately trained and equipped to deal with emergency situations.
- ☞ Holding, and periodically practicing fire drills, the use of fire extinguishers and building evacuations/lockdowns so employees will know what to do.
- ☞ Discussing specific hazardous materials that exist onsite such as flammable materials, toxic chemicals, radioactive sources, or water-reactive substances.
- ☞ Minimizing confusion, by clearly communicating to employees who will be in charge during an emergency (i.e. emergency wardens).
- ☞ Keeping emergency numbers posted in conspicuous locations in the workplace.
- ☞ Integrating emergency preparedness into every employee's work procedures and not leaving it in the hands of a few employees.
- ☞ Involving local emergency response services (EMS) and community disaster organizations in the preparation of emergency plans, their implementation (e.g. fire drills, use of HAZMAT teams, security measures) and their subsequent evaluation.
- ☞ Applying general guidelines to customers, contractors, suppliers or any other visitors who may frequent the premises.

The importance of emergency preparedness for business continuity.

Whether in the private or public sector, an important reason for preparing for emergencies is to ensure that an organization can continue to function in the event of an incident negatively affecting or shutting down its operations. Besides the critical aspect of ensuring the safety and health of employees and the public, good emergency planning can minimize the damage to infrastructure and client services. For example, a number of recent natural disasters have demonstrated the value in using new technologies to allow for telework capabilities and to safeguard crucial data sources and informatics through offsite storage. Where possible, some form of back-up capacity needs to be considered as part of 'contingency planning'. For the majority of businesses — in a highly competitive and increasingly global marketplace — they can't afford any downtime in their operations.⁶

Recommended Reading:

- ◆ [*Emergency Management Guide for Business and Industry*](#): U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency: (FEMA), October 2003
- ◆ [*A guide to strengthen emergency management of high-rise and high-risk buildings*](#): Office of the Ontario Fire Marshal (Canada), 2002
- ◆ [*Emergency Response Planning Guide*](#): Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety

Recommended Web Sites:

- ◆ Emergency Response Resources – U.S. National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health: <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/emres/>
- ◆ Emergency Preparedness and Response – U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration: <http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/emergencypreparedness/index.html>
- ◆ Office of Emergency Response Services – Public Health Agency of Canada: http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/emergency-urgence/index_e.html
- ◆ Public Safety Canada: <http://www.ps-sp.gc.ca/index-en.asp>
- ◆ Human Resources and Skills Development Canada – Fire Safety and Prevention: http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/labour/fire_protection/prevention/index.shtml
- ◆ Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety – Emergency Planning: <http://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/hsprograms/planning.html> :

⁶ CSA launches new emergency management standard: Mari-Len De Guzman, Canadian Occupational Safety, October 7, 2008

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