

Act Now!

How to prepare an emergency response plan for your small business

Emergencies and disasters can occur any time without warning. The more you are prepared for them, the better you will be able to act, minimizing panic and confusion when an emergency occurs. Relatively speaking, small businesses may have more to lose than large companies when a disaster — natural or otherwise — strikes. Because of high costs or lack of resources, many smaller companies have less rigorous business-continuity plans in place, and some have no formal processes at all.

The purpose of this bulletin is to help employers develop emergency response plans that will meet the specific needs of their small businesses. Your plan should take into account the type of business you are in and the nature of your worksite.

Start by asking these basic questions:

- How well prepared is your business now?
- What procedures do you already have in place for an emergency situation?
- What potential emergency situations could occur?

Occupational Health and Safety Regulation

The requirements for emergency preparedness and response are described in sections 4.13 through 4.18 of the Regulation.

Basic guidelines

Follow these basic guidelines to develop an effective emergency response plan for your workplace:

- Determine the conditions under which an evacuation would be necessary.
- Designate primary and secondary evacuation routes and emergency exits. Make sure they are clearly marked and well lit. Post signs. Install emergency lighting in case a power outage occurs during an evacuation.
- Ensure that evacuation routes and emergency exits are:
 - ~ Wide enough to accommodate the number of evacuating people
 - ~ Clear and unobstructed at all times
 - ~ Unlikely to expose evacuating people to additional hazards
- Coordinate your plan with the local emergency management office.
- Designate “evacuation wardens” who will help others during an evacuation and account for employees.
- Establish specific evacuation procedures. This bulletin includes a sample emergency response plan to give you a better idea what your procedures should include.
- Establish a system for accounting for evacuated employees.

- Hold emergency drills at least once a year to ensure that employees know what to do in an emergency and to test the effectiveness of emergency exit routes and procedures. Keep records of such drills.
- Consider the transportation needs of employees.
- Post evacuation procedures where employees can read them.
- Establish procedures for assisting people with disabilities and people who do not speak English.
- Consider how you would access important personal information about employees in an emergency (for example, contact numbers for their home, next-of-kin, and medical care). You could store emergency contact information for employees in sealed envelopes or on CD-ROMs.
- Establish procedures for further evacuation in case the incident expands. This may consist of sending employees home by normal means or providing them with transportation to an off-site location.
- Identify shelter space in your facility and the surrounding community.
- Establish procedures for sending evacuees to shelter.
- Develop a list of necessary emergency supplies such as water, food, and medical supplies.
- Coordinate plans with local authorities.

Search and rescue

Search and rescue efforts should only be conducted by properly trained and equipped professionals. Death or serious injury can occur if untrained employees re-enter a damaged or contaminated facility.

Assembly areas and accountability

Following a site evacuation, you should gather employees and other evacuees at a designated assembly area and account for each person to make sure everyone has been evacuated safely.

Accounting for evacuees takes planning and practice. Follow these guidelines:

- Designate assembly areas where people should gather after evacuating.
- Establish a head-count system for employees at the assembly area. The emergency operations coordinator should receive a list of the names and last-known locations of missing employees as soon as possible after arriving at the assembly area.
- Establish a method of accounting for non-employees such as suppliers and customers.

Education and training

Educate your employees about the types of emergencies that may occur, and train them in the proper course of action for emergency situations. Make sure they understand:

- The components of your emergency response plan
- Who will be in charge during an emergency

What should employee training include?

Emergency response training for your employees should address the following:

- Individual roles and responsibilities
- Potential threats, hazards, and protective actions

- Notification, warning, and communications procedures
- How to locate family members in an emergency
- Emergency response procedures
- Evacuation, shelter, and accountability procedures
- Location and use of common emergency equipment

What emergency information is necessary?

- Provide employees with information such as checklists and evacuation maps.
- Post evacuation maps in strategic locations.
- Consider the information needs of customers and others who visit your store.

How often should training take place?

You should conduct training sessions at least once a year, or whenever you:

- Hire new employees
- Designate evacuation wardens or others with special assignments
- Introduce new equipment, materials, or processes
- Find, through exercises, that employee performance needs to be improved

First aid

After a disaster or emergency situation, emergency services (fire, police, and medical) may be disrupted or unavailable for some time. It may be necessary to provide immediate care for an injured person if medical professionals cannot be reached. It is important to have a complete first aid kit and first aid training.

What level of first aid does my business need?

Visit WorkSafeBC.com to determine the appropriate level of first aid supplies, attendants, and services for your workplace. Click "Safety at Work" and under "Topics" click "First Aid."

Practical first aid knowledge greatly increases your chances of survival during any emergency situation. Check local first aid organizations for first aid classes.

Employee support

Employees are your most valuable asset. Providing support for them after an emergency will help them, which will in turn help your business continue to run as smoothly as possible. The range of services that you might provide or arrange for employees includes:

- Crisis counselling
- Reduced or flexible work hours
- Cash advances
- Salary continuation
- Care packages
- Daycare

Family preparedness

Employees who are prepared for emergencies at home are better able to carry out their responsibilities at work. Consider ways to help employees prepare for emergencies at home — this will increase their personal safety and can help your facility get back up and running quicker if an emergency occurs.

Sample emergency response plan

Company name:

Location:

Date completed:

Signed:

Emergency operations coordinator (EOC)

The emergency operations coordinator (EOC) is the person who serves as the main contact person for the company in an emergency. The EOC is responsible for making decisions and following the steps described in this emergency response plan. In the event of an emergency occurring within or affecting the worksite, the primary contact will serve as the EOC. If the primary contact is unable to fulfill the EOC duties, the secondary contact will take on this role.

Primary contact

Name:

Telephone number:

Other phone number:

E-mail:

Secondary contact

Name:

Telephone number:

Other phone number:

E-mail:

Emergency contact numbers

Fire station:

Ambulance:

Police:

Hospital:

Other:

Potential emergencies

The following potential emergencies have been identified in hazard assessments:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Location of emergency equipment

Fire alarm:

Fire extinguisher:

Fire hose:

Panic alarm button:

Personal protective equipment (PPE):

Emergency communication equipment:

Other:

Training requirements for emergency response

Type of training:

How often:

Employees trained in the use of emergency equipment

The following employees have received emergency equipment training:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

First aid

Type of first aid kit:

Location of first aid kit:

Other supplies:

Transportation for ill or injured employees:

First aid attendant (employee trained in first aid)

Name:

Location:

Shift or hours of work:

Communications

We will communicate our emergency plans to employees in the following way:

In the event of a disaster, we will communicate with employees in the following way:

Procedures for rescue and evacuation

Evacuation plan for _____ location
(address)

- We have developed these plans in collaboration with neighbouring businesses and building owners to avoid confusion or gridlock.
- We have located, copied, and posted building and site maps.
- We have ensured that exits are clearly marked.
- We will practice evacuation procedures _____ times a year.

If we must leave the workplace quickly, we will follow this evacuation procedure:

Warning system:

The warning system will be tested _____ times a year.

Assembly site:

Person responsible for issuing all clear:

Shelter-in-place plan for _____ location
(address)

- We have talked to co-workers about which emergency supplies, if any, the company will provide in the shelter location and which supplies individuals should consider keeping in a portable kit personalized for individual needs.

