

Emergency Response Planning

12 tips for an effective emergency response plan (ERP)



Keeping these ERP tips in mind will help you and your crew be better prepared for any emergency situation.

1. **Be prepared for anything.** Your work location and environment change regularly, even on a daily basis. You could be on a different site, drainage, or road system; the weather might be worse than yesterday; other contractors in the area might have come or gone. It's important for you and your crew to ask yourselves every morning: does our ERP have us covered today?
2. **911 is not a rescue plan.** You can't rely on 911 in the bush. The call won't work from most satellite phones and, if you do get through, rescue personnel may not be able to respond effectively to a forestry incident. Some jurisdictions don't even have the capacity to respond in such remote locations. If you can only make one call for help, clarify who that should be at your current workplace. Landline numbers for BC Ambulance are highly recommended.

3. **Go above and beyond.** When completing your first aid assessment, keep in mind that the First Aid Tables (3a) from WorkSafeBC are a minimum standard only. It's important to factor in the level of risk due to the remote nature of the work and how difficult it would be to get to medical aid, rather than only focusing on the risk of the work activity itself.
4. **Knowledge is power.** Make sure all workers on site know how to respond to an incident — don't rely only on a supervisor to coordinate help. The supervisor might not be available or could be the one actually needing assistance. It's essential that all workers are able to identify their physical work location at all times (e.g., latitude/longitude). They should also know where to find the communications equipment, how to use it, who to contact, and what to say.
5. **Don't be left hanging.** No one piece of communications equipment will work 100 percent all the time or in all areas. It's important to have a backup plan and/or other options available for communications (e.g., satellite phones, radios, cell phones). If your plan involves relaying information through different parties, be sure to practice getting a message through.
6. **Don't make assumptions.** Perform cell and satellite phone tests at every site to know what kind of coverage you have. Remember to check and charge the batteries often, and always carry spare batteries.
7. **Know your plan and practice it.** Don't wait for a real emergency to find out if your plan works. Conducting regular, realistic, and relevant emergency response drills is one of the best ways for you to verify how effective your plan is. It also serves as an excellent training opportunity for your crew. Practice these drills at as many worksites and with as many workers as possible. After each drill, discuss what you and your crew learned and where things could be improved, and then implement changes as needed. The point isn't to do it perfectly, but to learn and improve your plan every time.
8. **Opportunities for learning.** Consider adding an ERP review component to every accident investigation your firm does. This way, your emergency response plan is evaluated frequently and in the



context of actual incidents. The review could be as simple as asking: was our ERP adequate for the situation? What if things had been worse? Were we able to communicate with outside help in a timely manner?

9. **Know your neighbours.** People in the bush need to look out for each another. Take the initiative to find out which firms are working close to yours and what equipment they have — they might be able to respond and help you faster than anyone else.
10. **Many hands make light work.** Performing first aid treatment on a hillside is not the same as on the training room floor. It will be easier with a helper. As part of your plan, consider pre-determining a helper to go with your first aider. Given the challenging environment and remote locations of forestry work, having someone help stabilize the injured person on a slope, talk on the radio, or even keep things from blowing away, is an invaluable asset. Also, having more people on hand will be necessary when it comes to moving an injured worker. It's extremely difficult to move an injured person down a cut block and it'll be a struggle to move a stretcher with fewer than six to seven people.

11. **Plan beyond first aid.** Make sure your ERP goes beyond first aid and is adequate for other situations that would require emergency response, including fires, avalanches, landslides, sour gas, multiple injuries, etc.

12. **Prepare for evacuation.** Depending on your location and terrain, planning should account for evacuation by air or ground transport.

By air: Prepare for emergency heli-extractions by communicating frequently with helicopter companies, having pre-arranged radio channels, and mapping out helicopter landing areas in advance. Familiarize yourself with the different machines that may be sent to you so you'll know if your equipment will fit. Ask yourself: do you have the right emergency transportation equipment (ETE) for that configuration?

By ground: If BC ambulance is responding to your call, make sure you can verbally give driving directions to where you are and be prepared to rendezvous if necessary.