



Health & Safety

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Fire!

While consulting with a local industry, I came upon a poster that stated: "Everything I know about life, I learned in kindergarten." This is pretty much the case when it comes to "fire drills." Most of us had our initial fire evacuation training in elementary school, and that was probably the last time we participated in fire drills.

How do you think your employees would rate in a fire or emergency that required evacuation? Do they know the primary and alternate escape routes, and are the routes posted? Would they recognize the signal to evacuate? If the answer to any of these questions is "no," then maybe you should see what the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has to say about emergency planning and training in 29 CFR 1910.165, 1910.36 and 1910.38.

The Alarm System

The employee alarm system must provide warning for necessary emergency action called for in the Emergency Action Plan (EAP) or for safe escape. The alarm must be loud enough to be heard above environmental background noise, or bright enough to be seen above light levels, and must be both distinctive and recognizable. Spare alarm devices and components subject to wear shall be available for prompt replacement.

Reporting an Emergency

The employer must explain to each employee the preferred means of reporting emergencies, such as a manual-pull box alarm, public address system, radio or telephone. Emergency phone numbers must be posted near telephones, employee notice boards and other conspicuous locations. Workplaces with more than 10 employees must have a backup alarm system. Most electronics stores carry low-cost, hand-held "air horns" (commonly used in boating) that could serve as a backup system. Non-supervised alarm systems must be

tested every two months and kept in working order. Records of testing should be maintained. Alarm systems must be kept free of obstructions and located in a conspicuous location.

Supervised alarm systems must be tested annually. If the employee alarm is used to alert an on-site fire brigade, then a distinctive signal for each purpose must be used. One facility had created an elaborate system of horn signals for the employees, ranging from one long-one short, to five long-five shorts. They even had a special code that meant: "The inspector is here." Unfortunately, they had failed to provide an evacuation signal.

Fire Prevention Plan

The following elements, at a minimum, shall be included in the written fire prevention plan.

- List of workplace fire hazards and proper handling/storage procedures
- Potential ignition sources (such as welding and/or smoking, and their control procedures)
- Type of fire protection equipment or systems that can control a fire
- Names or regular job titles of personnel responsible for control of ignition or fires
- Housekeeping—control accumulation of flammable and combustible waste materials and residues that could contribute to a fire

Communication & Training

Employees must be informed of the fire hazards of materials and processes to which they are exposed. The written plan shall be kept in the workplace and made available for employee review.

Employee Action Plans

When an emergency action plan is required by an OSHA standard, the following elements must be included:

- Emergency escape procedures
- Emergency escape route assignments

- Procedures to be followed by employees who remain to complete critical plant operations before they evacuate
- Procedures to account for all employees after an evacuation
- Rescue and medical duties for employees who are able to perform them (keeping in mind that OSHA has issued a notice that employees be trained *not* to assist in emergencies unless they have received special training and have the proper equipment)
- Preferred means of reporting fires and other emergencies
- Names or regular job titles of personnel who can be contacted for further information or explanation of duties under the plan

Selecting Exits

When planning emergency escape routes, give careful attention to doorways that can be used. An overhead door may not be used in the plan for an emergency exit, because an electric overhead door can be rendered useless in an emergency involving a power outage. OSHA therefore requires that they not be included in the plan.

By giving a little attention to this matter, perhaps your employees will say, "Everything I need to know about fire safety, I learned in our company's written emergency action and fire prevention plan." *P&SF*

About the Columnist

Martha S. Martin, CEF, is a compliance manager with Delta Compliance Consultants, Delta Chemicals & Equipment, Inc. An Indiana University graduate, she holds the professional designation of Certified Environmental Compliance Manager (CECM), is past president of the AESF Indianapolis Branch, vice chair of the AESF Environmental Section, and member of the AESF OSHA and Membership Committees.