



SAFETY TALKS:

How Good Are Your Emergency Action Plans?

Emergencies happen every day, yet there are many of us who have never faced an emergency situation. Unfortunately, complacency can be fatal. In the event of a real emergency, it's important to have effective emergency action plans that have been trained and exercised to the point that reactions become instinctive. The more thoughtfully your plan has been practiced, the less likely your employees will be completely panic-stricken, and the more likely, they are to take prompt action. It's a sad statistic that most people wait too long to react in an emergency. Emergency drills and exercises are the key to a prompt, and appropriate response. In emergency management there are three types of exercises/drills:

Tabletops: the easiest to conduct, tabletops take the least amount of time and provides the least disruption to daily operations. During a tabletop exercise, you can use facility maps, written plans, and a team of supervisors, managers and employees to review the plans and discuss "what if" scenarios.

Example: *If there is a fire here, what would you do? How would you exit the building? Or "If there's a chemical release here, and the prevailing winds are blowing the vapor cloud this direction, which way would you travel, and which assembly area would you use?*

Functional exercises: similar to the traditional fire drills and tornado drills many of us grew up participating in at school, these exercises are where you practice the physical procedures by actually evacuating or sheltering in place. Functional exercises can be as simple or as complex as your facility's hazards demand. It's also helpful to have local EMS onboard with a functional exercise. Local fire departments can use these exercises as an opportunity to train their responders on what to expect when they respond to an incident at your facility. They get the chance to learn the lay of the land, where chemicals are stored, and what hazards they need to anticipate. It's especially important when you have hazardous operations that could become deadly in an emergency situation. Fire fighters need to know if you have special hazards, such as combustible metals that could react and even explode if water were used to put out the fire.

Full Scale: A full-scale exercise is as close to the real thing as possible. It is a lengthy exercise which takes place on location using, as much as possible, the equipment and personnel that would be called upon in a real event. Full-scale exercises are often conducted by public agencies. They often include participation from local businesses. In full-scale exercises, volunteers are used to simulate accident victims and the use of moulage (make up to simulate injuries) is implemented. These types of exercises require coordination with local EMS because if neighbors see simulated victims laying in the parking lot, they might not understand that it's an exercise, and may call 911, sparking a panic.

Exercises should be evaluated to determine whether exercise objectives were met and to identify opportunities for program improvement. A facilitated "hot wash" discussion held at the end of an exercise is a great way to solicit feedback and identify suggestions for improvement. For more information, visit:

<https://www.ready.gov/business/testing/exercises>

2400 Vermont Ave. • Oklahoma City, OK 73108 • 405.848.8626 • oksafety.org
9810 E. 42nd St. Ste 205 Seminole Bldg. • Tulsa, OK 74146 • 918-622-4771 • oksafety.org