

Workplace/Employee Preparedness

Making sure your employees are prepared ahead of time is one of the keys to reducing the negative effects of an emergency situation. A prepared employee will know what to do in an emergency, and as a result will panic less. Make sure your employees are ready ahead of time.

Preparing: Employee Preparedness – Awareness

An essential step of preparing your business for emergencies is raising employees' awareness of the types of possible emergencies. Do your employees know the dangers of tornadoes? Do employees who work outside understand the importance of hydration in hot weather? Do members of your organization know how to respond when the power goes out? Getting these preparedness messages to your employees now will make sure that if they are faced with an emergency in the future, they will be armed with the information to help them make it through safely.

There are many ways to communicate awareness messages to your employees. Consider the following:

- If your company or organization has a monthly or weekly newsletter, include periodic reminders about emergency preparedness.
- Invite a local emergency manager, such as a fire chief or law enforcement officer, to come speak to your employees about emergency preparedness and response.
- Post flyers around your office that list tips for responding to various types of emergencies.
- Solicit employee volunteers when you are developing an [emergency preparedness and response plan](#) for your business or organization.
- Mail seasonal letters to your employees and their families. For example, in early summer mail out a letter that outlines hurricane preparedness tips.

Preparing: Employee Preparedness – Supply Kit

Make sure that employees have the supplies they will need during an emergency. When putting together a supply kit, remember to include items for use during confinement. Also, include items that would help you and your employees evacuate safely.

Each employee's emergency supply kit should include the following:

- Flashlight
- Battery-powered radio, preferably NOAA Weather Radio
- Extra batteries, which should be replaced every six months
- Whistle
- Snack food, such as energy bars, trail mix, cheese and crackers, beef jerky or dried fruit, to last at least one day
- Bottled water, at least one gallon
- At least a one-day supply of any required medications, including any non-prescription medications you normally take. Talk to your doctor or pharmacist about how these should be stored.
- Basic first aid kit
- Tools and other supplies:
 - Blanket
 - Personal hygiene items, to include toothbrush, toothpaste, comb or brush, soap, contact lens supplies and feminine hygiene items
 - Extra pair of comfortable shoes
 - An extra pair of eyeglasses, if you wear them.

Preparing: Employee Preparedness – Communication Plan & Meeting Place

Developing a detailed communication plan and determining a meeting place are important for the safety of your employees during and after an emergency.

What is a communication plan?

A communication plan ensures that you will be able to communicate with your employees in an emergency and they will have plans on how to communicate with their families.

- Make sure that emergency contact information is on file for all employees. This information should include contact information for the employee, as well as at least one family member or close friend. It's a good idea for key employees, such as department managers, to have copies of this information not only at the office, but at their homes as well.
- If you have a voicemail system at your office, designate one number that will play recorded emergency messages. Make sure your employees know to call this number in case there's an emergency and they're not in the office, and make sure that the information on it is up-to-date.

- Advise your employees to ask an out-of-town friend or relative to serve as their family's personal contact. Family members will call this contact and tell him or her where they are during emergencies. Make sure that all family members know the contact's phone and cell phone numbers. Be aware that cell phones are often overloaded during and immediately after an emergency.

Determining a meeting place

In addition to a communications plan, make sure that you and your employees all know where to meet when there is an emergency.

- Do **not** leave the office to go to the meeting place if there are advisories to stay where you are.
- The meeting place should be near your office.
- Make sure the meeting place is accessible to all employees.

Preparing: Employee Preparedness – Evacuation Plan

Your organization should develop an evacuation plan to get employees to safety when disaster strikes. This essential component of your [emergency plan](#) needs to be communicated clearly to all employees through a variety of channels.

- Post maps of the evacuation route in public areas, such as break rooms.
- Review the evacuation route with all new employees, as part of the orientation process.
- Go over the evacuation route with employees regularly as part of emergency awareness workshops.

The evacuation route is not the only component of the evacuation plan that your employees need to be aware of. Marshals need to be designated to make sure that all employees receive and follow the message to evacuate the building. There must be at least one female and one male marshal, so that bathrooms can be checked. Make sure that all employees know who the marshals are, and that if a marshal leaves your employ, a new marshal is designated immediately.

Preparing: Employee Preparedness – Coordinate

Make sure that employees have coordinated their plans with other family members and their children's schools. Employees should make sure that their emergency contact information is on file at these locations. Likewise, an employee should be aware of the emergency procedures, including evacuation and meeting places, of their children's schools and the workplaces of other family members. This information will ensure that in an emergency, an employee knows where his or her family is.

Preparing: Employee Preparedness – Response Plan: Roles and Drills

Once you have drafted an [emergency response plan](#), make sure that every employee understands his or her role in that plan. Employees should have a clear idea of what actions they must take in case of emergency. These roles may be partially defined by the job responsibilities or physical capabilities of the employee. Be sure that employees with disabilities are included in planning and that their needs are met.

To ensure that your employees remain aware of their roles in an emergency, it is a good idea to hold regular drills in which they play out their roles. These drills might be artificial, but small details such as turning off the lights can make them seem realistic to a degree. Though it should be clear to the employees that it is a drill, it might be most beneficial for these drills to be surprise drills.

If you have [employees with disabilities](#), make sure that they participate in all drills and exercises. This practice will ensure that they are able to access all emergency evacuation routes. Also, if other employees are charged with helping those with disabilities, make sure that this role is included in all drills.

Also, get involved with local drills and exercises. For example, every year in March the National Weather Service and the Virginia Department of Emergency Management co-sponsor a statewide tornado drill. Contact your [local emergency manager](#) for information on emergency drills and exercises in your area.

These drills, along with more elaborate exercises, should all be part of the [emergency response plan](#).