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## **An Emergency Plan For Your Business**

The workplace is a place of danger. If you think yours is safe, think again! You don't have to be running a factory to have dangerous situations arise; an office can also be a hazardous place to spend the day.

Emergencies come in all shapes and sizes. As an employer you have to be able to cope with anything – from a cut finger to a fire or flood. How well you prepare before such emergencies will largely determine your success if and when they arise.

The key to it all is minimizing risk. Although the cause of an emergency can be completely outside your control you can take steps to reduce the effects on both people and property.

One of the most important things you can do to minimize risk is to have an emergency plan in place. This includes communicating details of it to everyone on your team. And speaking of your team, they should be thoroughly involved in the development of your plan. Don't take on the whole responsibility yourself.

Start by taking a good look around your office. How many ways are there to get safely in and out of the building? Where are the fire extinguishers? If the lights go out can the exits be clearly seen? If a fire blocks the main entrance can everyone get out safely by another exit? Once you start imagining disasters it's much easier to think of ways to survive them.

One thing you can do is to work out a basic procedure to follow if an emergency occurs. A sample of a general procedure could be:

Follow these rules in an emergency

- Stop work and leave the building IMMEDIATELY when the fire alarm sounds or when you are instructed to do so!
- Follow instructions, avoid panic, and cooperate with those responding to the emergency.
- Proceed to the designated or nearest exit.
- If you are not endangering yourself turn off computers, office equipment, fans, etc., and close desk drawers.
- Do NOT delay your exit from the building by looking for belongings or other people.
- When leaving the building, go to a clear area well away from the building. Do not obstruct fire hydrants or the responding fire/rescue workers and their equipment.
- Do not re-enter the building until instructed to do so by your supervisor or fire/rescue worker.

Now we'll consider some other parts of your plan for dealing with emergencies in your business.

1. Set up an employee and next of kin emergency contact system. This includes maintaining details for every team member.
2. Maintain easily accessible first aid kits, water, tool kits and other emergency supplies. Put up signs outside their storage areas identifying their locations.
3. Make sure that all essential records are backed up and stored in another location. This includes such vital information as details of team members and their next of kin contact details.
4. Periodically review and update fire and gas detectors, and fire extinguishing systems.
5. Know the telephone numbers for your emergency service providers and critical infrastructure service providers – Police, Fire, Ambulance, and Utilities.

Remember that this is a team effort. Involve as many of your team members as possible when developing your business' emergency procedures. You'll find their contributions invaluable.

Imagine the emergency occurring, then working together come up with steps to take that will get everyone out safely. When everything's worked out prepare a final document that outlines every detail. Give every member of your team a copy and when new members join give one to them too.

Hopefully you'll never have to use the emergency plan you develop but if an emergency happens and you haven't prepared for it, you'll wish you had.

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