

"For safety's sake—do something."

Emergency Response at Work

OSHA requires businesses to have an *Emergency Action Plan* for the workplace that addresses possible emergencies and how employees are to respond to such emergencies. The plans are to provide emergency response contact information, as well as exit routes, shelter-in-place locations, and safe areas for different types of emergencies. Employers should test their plans to ensure that their plan works and employees have practiced the plan. Although not specifically mandated in OSHA, there is a strong suggestion that emergency plans be tested to identify errors and to get employees involved. This is commonly viewed as a lesson learned and a great opportunity to test the plan for needed updates.

Many businesses hold annual drills in their offices / workplaces to ensure that employees get some hands-on practice in responding to different types of emergencies. You may choose to use a fire drill, a severe weather drill, or even a shelter-in-place drill at your location, but practicing the plan will help ensure success if ever needed. Communicating what employees are to do during an emergency is important. This is usually done by having emergency escape routes posted around the workplace to help others in case they forget where to go. The maps and routes are a great reminder to employees throughout the year. The saying that “practice makes perfect” is very true when employees are responding to emergencies.

During the COVID pandemic, many businesses elected to not hold emergency drills in the workplace, due to limited staffing, social distancing requirements, and large groupings. In lieu of physical testing, employers used messaging to outline their Emergency Action Plan. Reminders should discuss the employee's response actions, communicate the expectations, and verify that your plans and postings are current and updated. Employees should annually review the Emergency Action Plan for their workplace, and ask their manager or safety team, if they have any questions. Evacuation routes, designated shelter locations, and evacuation staging locations should be known by all employees. At SSOE, we post our Emergency Action Plan on the [company intranet](#). This allows employees to review the information any time they wish. If you are not an SSOE employee, I encourage you to ask your manager where your office Emergency Action Plan is located and where you can find the information needed to have a safe response during an emergency at your workplace.

As employees return to workplaces, it is imperative to ensure that they are reminded about what to do in case of an emergency. Think about the workforce that has not been in the workplace for several months, or even a year or so, and ask what they may have forgotten. A simple reminder of the plan and expectations will help.

Tips for handling emergencies:

- Evaluate your workplace to identify additional risks during an emergency.
- Determine safe areas internally for sheltering-in-place and areas to hold up in if trapped.
- Ensure employees do not use elevators.
- Identify exits and then routes from routine areas. Post these in common areas.
- Ensure exits are clear for travel, not impeded, and not locked. Signs should identify all exits.
- During an evacuation, conduct headcounts and accountability checks to ensure everyone has escaped.
- Identify extinguisher locations and mark on your mapping.
- Train employees on what to do.
- Review and update Emergency Action Plans annually.

Be prepared for an emergency.

Know what to do.

**"Safety always is
ALWAYS!"**