EMERGENCY PLANS
FACT SHEET

Overview

This fact sheet provides general guidance for persons conducting a business or undertaking (PCBUs) and workers on preparing and maintaining general emergency plans for fixed workplaces under regulation 43 of the Work Health and Safety (WHS) Regulations.

It does not cover additional requirements that apply to higher risk workplaces such as Major Hazard Facilities.

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Duty to prepare an emergency plan

PCBUs must ensure that an emergency plan is prepared for the workplace, including for workers who may work at multiple workplaces.

What is an emergency plan?

An emergency plan is a written set of instructions that outlines what workers and others at the workplace should do in an emergency. An emergency plan must provide for the following:

- emergency procedures, including:
  - an effective response to an emergency
  - evacuation procedures
  - notifying emergency service organisations at the earliest opportunity
  - medical treatment and assistance, and
  - effective communication between the person authorised to coordinate the emergency response and all people at the workplace
- testing of the emergency procedures—including the frequency of testing, and
- information, training and instruction to relevant workers in relation to implementing the emergency procedures.

What types of emergencies should be covered?

The types of emergencies to plan for may include fire, explosion, medical emergency, rescues, incidents with hazardous chemicals, bomb threats, armed confrontations and natural disasters.

The emergency plan should be based on a practical assessment of hazards associated with the work activity or workplace, and the possible consequences of an emergency occurring as a result of those hazards. External hazards should also be considered in preparing an emergency plan, for example a chemical storage facility across the road.

In developing the plan, consideration should be given to the application of all relevant laws, including public health laws (for example, workplaces that are also public places) and state or territory disaster plans.

Level of detail—relevant factors to be considered

Emergency plans do not necessarily have to be lengthy or complex. They should be easy to understand and tailored to the specific workplace where they apply.

In preparing an emergency plan, all relevant matters need to be considered including:

- the nature of the work being carried out at the workplace
- the nature of the hazards at the workplace
- the size and location of the workplace, for example, remoteness, proximity to health services, and
- the number and composition of the workers, for example, employees, contractors, and other persons at the workplace such as visitors.

Special consideration may need to be provided for workers who travel for work, work alone or in remote locations. The checklist on page 4 of this fact sheet provides examples of relevant factors to consider.

Examples of inclusions in an emergency plan

An emergency plan may include practical information for workers such as:

- emergency contact details for key personnel who have specific roles or responsibilities under the emergency plan, for example fire wardens, floor wardens and first aid officers
- contact details for local emergency services, for example police, fire brigade and poison information centre
- a description of the mechanisms for alerting people at the workplace to an emergency or possible emergency, for example siren or bell alarm
- evacuation procedures including arrangements for assisting any hearing, vision or mobility-impaired people

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- a map of the workplace illustrating the location of fire protection equipment, emergency exits, assembly points

- triggers and processes for advising neighbouring businesses about emergencies, and

- the post-incident follow-up process, for example notifying the regulator, organising trauma counselling or medical treatment.

Procedures for testing the emergency plan including the frequency of testing must be included.

Additional requirements for higher-risk workplaces

Higher-risk workplaces may require additional information in their emergency plans. Examples of these workplaces include:

- workplaces with confined spaces

- workplaces that use fall arrest harness systems

- Major Hazard Facilities and mines

- workplaces that handle or manage asbestos

- workplaces that store or handle hazardous chemicals, and

- workplaces that carry out demolition and refurbishment sites.

For more information about these requirements refer to the relevant chapters in the WHS Regulations and the related Codes of Practice.

Access to the emergency plan

Emergency plans, or a summary of key elements of emergency plans, should be readily accessible by workers or on display in the workplace, for example on a notice board.

Training in emergency procedures

Workers must be adequately trained in emergency procedures. Arrangements for information, training and instruction of workers must be set out in the emergency plan itself.

Training may include practising evacuations, identifying assembly points, location of emergency equipment, first aid arrangements and how to safely shut down machinery.

In determining training requirements, the following should be considered:

- inclusion of emergency procedure training in induction courses for new workers

- provision of refresher training for existing workers

- provision of training for short-term contractors or visitors at the workplace (this may not need to be as extensive as may be required for workers), and

- provision of specific training for individuals who have a formal role in an emergency for example fire wardens, floor wardens, first aid officers.

Shared workplaces

In shared workplaces PCBUs must consult, cooperate and coordinate activities with all other persons who have a work health or safety duty in relation to the same matter, so far as is reasonably practicable.

In shared workplaces where there are multiple PCBUs, a master emergency plan could be prepared that all relevant duty holders use. Examples of shared workplaces include shopping centres, construction sites or office buildings.

More information and guidance on consultation is available in the Code of Practice Work Health and Safety Consultation, Cooperation and Coordination.

Implementing emergency plans

Emergency plans must be implemented in an emergency. Directions from emergency services workers must also be complied in an emergency.

Reviewing emergency plans

For emergency plans to remain current and effective they must be reviewed and revised (if necessary) on a regular basis. For example:

- when there are changes to the workplace such as re-location or refurbishments
- when there are changes in the number or composition of staff including an increase in the use of temporary contractors
- when new activities have been introduced, and
- after the plan has been tested.

Further information

More work health and safety resources are available on the Safe Work Australia website.

Disclaimer

Note: this fact sheet provides general information only and should not be used as a substitute for seeking professional legal advice for your specific circumstances. The contents of this fact sheet are correct and based on available information at the time of writing. However, there may be subsequent decisions of courts or tribunals on the matter covered by this fact sheet which mean that the contents are no longer accurate.

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Checklist: Emergency plans

	Yes	No
Responsibilities		
• Has someone with appropriate skills been made responsible for specific actions in an emergency, for example managing an evacuation or assigning area wardens?		
• Is someone responsible for making sure all workers and others in the workplace, for example contractors, customers and visitors are accounted for in an evacuation?		
• Do workers working alone know what to do in an emergency?		
• Are specific procedures in place for critical functions, for example power shut-downs?		
Emergency contact details		
• Are emergency contact details relevant to the types of possible threats, for example fire brigade, police and poison information centre?		
• Are the emergency contact details displayed at the workplace in an easily accessible location?		
• Are contact details updated regularly?		
Evacuations		
• Have all emergencies requiring an evacuation at the workplace been identified?		
• Has an evacuation procedure been prepared (if applicable)?		
• Does the procedure:		
– address all types of situations and hazards which may arise at the workplace		
– cover everyone who may be present at the workplace		
– allow for quick and safe evacuation when needed		
– clearly identify routes to safe assembly areas consider special assistance for hearing, vision or mobility-impaired people, and		
– include a process for accounting for persons?		
Evacuations for a fixed workplace		
• Is the evacuation procedure clearly and prominently displayed at the workplace, where practicable?		
• Is there a mechanism, for example a siren or bell alarm for alerting staff of an emergency?		
– If yes, is it regularly tested to ensure its effectiveness?		
• Is there a documented site plan that illustrates the location of fire protection equipment, emergency exits and assembly points?		
– If yes, is it posted in key locations throughout the workplace?		
• Are all exits, corridors and aisles readily accessible and kept clear of obstructions?		
• Does the workplace have illuminated exit signs?		

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	Yes	No
Fire protection equipment		
• Does the workplace have appropriate fire protection equipment?		
– Is it suitable for the types of risks at the workplace, for example foam or dry powder type extinguishers for fires that involve flammable liquids?		
– Is it properly maintained and regularly checked and tested by the local fire authority or fire equipment supplier?		
– Is the area where the equipment is stored kept clear of obstructions?		
• Are adequate numbers of workers trained to use fire extinguishers?		
– Do they know what type of extinguisher to use for different types of fires?		
Extreme weather conditions		
• If there is a risk of extreme or dangerous weather conditions, for example bushfire, floods or storms, will the control measures be effective in these conditions?		
• Do emergency procedures accommodate declarations of extreme weather warnings? Examples of extreme weather warnings may include warnings such as a code red in the case of extreme bushfires or categories 3, 4 or 5 for cyclone warnings.		
– Do declarations of extreme weather warnings in the emergency plan include matters such as: safe exit routes, for example the process for identifying and communicating roads that may be closed?		
– Do procedures identify the closest designated 'safe place'?		
– Do procedures accommodate evacuation procedures of the relevant local authorities for example the fire services, SES and police?		
– Do workers have access to reliable communications equipment?		
• Are workers trained in emergency evacuation and related procedures?		
• If workers travel into areas where extreme weather warnings may be declared, have appropriate policies and procedures been developed for when such declarations are made?		
Chemical safety		
• Are current safety data sheets available for all hazardous chemicals on site?		
• Are all hazardous chemicals labelled and stored in a safe manner?		
• Is appropriate equipment available to initially respond to a chemical incident, for example absorbent material to contain a liquid spill?		
• Is appropriate personal protective equipment and training provided to protect workers who are called on to deal with an unplanned chemical release?		
First aid		
• Has a first aid assessment been conducted?		
• Does the workplace have trained first aiders and suitable first aid facilities?		
• Are workers aware of where first aid facilities are kept and who first aiders are?		

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	Yes	No
Neighbouring businesses		

• Have neighbouring businesses been considered if an emergency occurs?
  – How would they be advised of an emergency situation arises (if applicable)?
  – Should they be consulted about the preparation and coordination of emergency plans?
• Have the risks from neighbouring businesses been considered, for example fire from restaurant/takeaway food outlets, Q fever from cattle yards or vehicle accidents on major roads?		

Post incident follow-up		
• Are there procedures in place to notify the relevant regulator about a notifiable incident where necessary? • Are there procedures in place to ensure the cause of the emergency is determined and action is taken to prevent a similar incident occurring again? • Are there procedures in place to ensure the welfare of workers after an emergency or an incident, for example medical treatment or trauma counselling?		
Review		
• Are emergency plan practice runs undertaken to assess the effectiveness of the emergency plan, for example evacuation drills? • Is someone responsible for documenting and retaining the results of emergency plan practice runs? • Is someone responsible for reviewing the emergency plan and informing workers of any revisions?		

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