

Conducting Emergency Drills Is No Joke



I remember how much we loved fire drills in school. After all, they interrupted class and gave us a chance to talk and socialize. In short, fire drills were fun.

When I grew up and was out in the workplace, I no longer saw fire drills as fun but as an inconvenience that disrupted my day and kept me from getting my work done. And my co-workers felt the same way. We just wanted them to be over with as quickly as possible.

Bottom line: Fire and similar emergencies drills aren't always taken seriously—but that doesn't mean your workplace shouldn't hold them. In fact, emergency drills are a very important safety tool.

For example, when a fire broke out in the engine room of a small fishing vessel off BC, two crew members tried to fight the fire but failed. So they abandoned ship and issued a distress call. The vessel burned to the waterline and subsequently sank. Luckily, no one was injured.

The Transportation Safety Board of Canada's investigation report into the incident noted that the crew rarely conducted any formal emergency exercises or drills nor were there any written procedures in place for emergency drills. As a result, crew members were unfamiliar with how the firefighting equipment worked. The report concluded that "not practising or evaluating emergency drills routinely can leave crew members at risk of being unprepared in cases of emergency."

But not all workplaces conduct regular emergency drills. In a recent poll, we asked if you conduct emergency drills in your workplace. The results:

- 48% said they hold regular emergency drills
- 30% said they don't conduct emergency drills at all
- And 22% said they occasionally hold emergency drills.