

Emergency Response: How to Implement a Fire Evacuation Plan



Fires strike without warning. But while you can't predict them, you can prepare for them. In most workplaces, the first imperative of emergency response is getting everybody the heck out. Being prepared to evacuate can prevent fatalities and injuries, not to mention OHS fines. Here's a strategy you can put into effect over a 30-day period to establish an Emergency Evacuation Plan for not just fires but all kinds of emergencies.

Preliminary: Do You Need an Evacuation Plan'

Most workplaces do need an Evacuation Plan. The exceptions are those with an emergency response strategy based on sheltering in place rather than evacuation, e.g., workplaces that rely on fixed fire suppression systems and/or in-house fire brigades in which all workers are trained and equipped for firefighting and nobody is required to evacuate.

Step 1: Hazard Assessment (Day 1 to 5)

If an Evacuation Plan is necessary, the first step in developing it is to perform a hazard assessment to determine which hazards in your workplace could cause an emergency. In addition to fire, explosion, toxic release and chemical spill,

consider the risks of other natural and manmade emergencies like:

- Flood;
- Hurricane;
- Tornado;
- Earthquake;
- Chemical spill;
- Terrorist attack; and
- Workplace violence.

Step 2: Select Safety Controls'Develop Your Evacuation Plan (Day 6-15)

Use the findings of your hazard assessment to develop a written Evacuation Plan that includes 4 kinds of measures:

Personnel Assignments: The Evacuation Plan should establish a clear chain of command in which all personnel have clearly assigned roles in the event of an evacuation including:

- A leader with authority to order an evacuation or shutdown;
- At least one evacuation warden for every 20 workers to help with the evacuation and ensure that everybody is accounted for before evacuating themselves;
- Individuals to remain behind to carry out vital plant or close-down operations before evacuating themselves; and
- Individuals authorized to perform rescue or medical duties in the event of an evacuation.

List the name or job title of a contact person that workers may go to for more information about the Evacuation Plan or their duties under it.

Evacuation Procedures: At a minimum, the Evacuation Plan should include:

- Procedures for reporting fires and other emergencies;
- Emergency evacuation procedures, including evacuation type and exit route assignments;
- Procedures to help disabled workers requiring assistance to evacuate;
- Procedures for workers who remain behind to operate critical plant operations before evacuating themselves;
- Procedures to account for all workers after evacuation; and
- Procedures for the workers performing rescue or medical duties.

Alarm & Notification Systems: Engineering controls to incorporate into your Evacuation Plan include:

- An alarm system that uses a distinctive signal that all workers recognize to communicate orders to evacuate or perform other actions under the Plan;
- A public address or other emergency communications system to notify workers of the emergency and contact local fire, police and other emergency responders;
- An auxiliary power supply in case electricity is shut off.

PPE & Protective Clothing: Workers counted on to extinguish fires or otherwise exposed to risk of fire and explosion must be equipped with and use appropriate PPE and protective clothing that meet the requirements of your province's OHS laws. Workers who perform interior structural firefighting operations must be furnished, at no cost to themselves:

- Foot and leg protection;
- Protective footwear;
- Body protection;
- Gloves or glove systems;
- Head, eye and face protection; and
- Respiratory protective equipment.

Step Three: Provide Evacuation Plan Training & Education (Day

16-20)

Workers must receive the training and education they need to carry out their roles under the Evacuation Plan and help in the safe and orderly evacuation of other workers. At a minimum, such training should address:

- Individual roles and responsibilities;
- Threats, hazards and protective actions;
- Notification, communication and warning procedures;
- Means of locating family members in an emergency;
- Emergency response procedures;
- Evacuation, shelter and accountability procedures;
- Location and use of emergency equipment; and
- Procedures for emergency shutdown.

Training for workers designated to engage in firefighting operations must also be trained in the appropriate use of the equipment when they're initially assigned and at least once a year after that.

Step Four: Inspect, Monitor, Reinforce and Improve Your Evacuation Plan (Day 21-30 and forever after)

You must review the Evacuation Plan with covered workers immediately after:

- You first develop the Plan;
- You first assign a worker to carry out responsibilities under the Plan;
- You change the worker's responsibilities under the Plan; and
- You change the Plan itself.

Conduct drills to practice your evacuation procedures and identify flaws that need to be corrected and potential places for improvement.

Last but not least, monitor your Evacuation Plan on an ongoing

and continuous basis. So, even though we 'schedule' it as starting on Day 21 and ending on Day 30, the monitoring process never ends. Monitoring should be done on a regular basis, e.g., fire inspections should be part of monthly work inspections and scheduled safety audits, and in response to red flags like:

- Worker complaints;
- Incident and injuries;
- Significant changes to operations, equipment, personnel etc. that weren't accounted for or anticipated in the previous hazard assessment.

[Click here](#) for a schedule you can use to monitor your Evacuation Plan.