

National Preparedness Month – September 2007:

FIRST THINGS TO DO:

Work Related Emergencies

By John Cavanagh and Anne Malia

Due to their unexpected nature, emergency situations are often chaotic. People react to different situations in different ways, and it is very common for an individual to lose his or her composure during a crisis and forget the appropriate actions to take. Although it is necessary to have a detailed emergency plan, one should also have a very basic concept of what to do in the event of an emergency. By making a “First Things To Do” list, businesses can be confident that members of the work force will be able to handle themselves properly in the event of a disaster. Each emergency situation is different, but there are basic guidelines that can help you through any incident that might occur. The following list of the first things to do in any emergency contains overall tips that could fit most situations.

First Things to Do in Any Emergency

- Stay calm. This will allow you to think clearly and use common sense.
- Access the scenario for danger. Decide whether it is safer to evacuate or shelter-in-place.
- Once safely evacuated or sheltered-in-place, call for help using 911 and clearly explain what you know about the situation.
- Provide first aid for any injured people. Move any people who are injured away from further danger.
- Obtain as much information about the emergency as possible, without putting yourself in danger. Pass the information on to emergency responders when they arrive on the scene.

The most common office emergencies are fires, so it is important that all businesses and offices have a plan for what they would do in the event that a fire starts in their building. Each employee should be familiar with the following list in order to know what to do in case of an evacuation. While the above mentioned

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steps will help in *any* emergency, these more specific actions could make the difference between life and death during a fire.

First Things To Do in a Fire

1. Know your escape routes. Make sure that employees are aware of the easiest escape route. Elevators should always be avoided, as they are often unreliable or even dangerous to use during an emergency. If there is only one exit route or if the business is in a high-rise building, employees should be familiar with the location of the fire escapes and how to safely exit the building using them. Do not forget to plan usable escape routes for employees who have disabilities, and designate someone to assist them in the event of an evacuation.

2. Stay low. As we are taught at a young age, smoke rises, and it is important to stay low to ground in order to avoid it. This is an easy step that every employee should remember, because it will make evacuation easier (since the escaping employee will be able to see more clearly and will be breathing in less smoke.) Feel doors for heat to judge whether fire is on the other side. If fire *is* on the other side, make sure that the door is completely closed and wave a towel or piece of clothing out the window to get the attention of a firefighter or a rescuer.

3. Call for help. Never stop while inside a burning building to call 911—get out first! In many cases, a neighbor or passerby might have called 911 while you were in the process of evacuating the building. However, if responders still have not arrived on the scene, it is important to make sure that someone *has* called. If the fire was small, people from the outside of the building might not have been able to detect it. Never assume that someone else has called rescuers. Waiting even a few minutes before making that 911 call could cost lives.

4. Get to a meeting spot. Most likely, your business has a meeting place set up where employees will meet if the building is evacuated. If your business doesn't have such a spot, take the initiative to set one up! As soon as you get out of the burning building, get to the meeting spot. Once there, employees can survey who is safe and who might be trapped inside the building. Employees can then alert firefighters as to where their co-workers may be located.

Resource 14 - Businesses:

Fire Safety Directory

<http://www.firesafety.gov/directory/>

This free online directory contains links to residential fire safety resources available on the websites of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Consumer Product Safety Commission, and the U.S. Fire Administration. A brief description of each resource is provided, along with a link to the resource webpage.

TOMORROW: Employer Responsibilities in Emergencies

About The Authors

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