EMERGENCY ACTION PLANS

When something such as a fire, tornado, bomb threat, or other emergency occurs, you need to know where to go and what to do. Your Department must develop a plan (called an emergency action plan) for emergency situations such as these, so that there is literally a 'plan of action' for you to take.

It is extremely important for you to be aware of and familiar with the emergency plan or plans in place at your Department, and to know what your Department expects you to do in an emergency. Most companies include this type of information in orientation or initial training.

In addition, companies give reminders of emergency evacuation locations or conduct fire drill procedures on a continuing basis to refresh everyone on emergency procedures. If you have not been informed of emergency evacuation or emergency action plan information, ask your manager or your immediate supervisor what the expected response is in an emergency situation. Remember, one type of emergency may differ from another, so the responses may differ too.

The following sections provide more general information related to some common types of emergency situations:

- Fire Safety;
- Severe Weather;
- Earthquakes;
- Bomb Threats.

FIRE SAFETY

Fires and explosions kill about 160 workers and injure 2,400 more each year. In 2005, the estimated 115,000 non-residential structural fires that occurred cost businesses more than $2.3 billion. Obviously, the best defense against a fire is to prevent it from starting in the first place. Although many items stored in an office work area are not flammable, paper and packaging commonly used in offices are definite fire hazards. In addition, overload of electric outlets and poor housekeeping is common causes of fire in the office environment.

See the Office Equipment chapter in this handbook for general electrical safety tips that will help you prevent fires and the General Office Hazards chapter for information on good housekeeping that will help you keep your work area a neat and clean place unlikely to cause or contribute to a fire.

If a fire does occur, safe and orderly evacuation is necessary. Your department should have an established evacuation plan, with procedures and exits indicated. Find out what it is and where you are expected to go during a fire or fire drill.

A head count location should be established so that once everyone is evacuated, you meet at a designated spot so that everyone can be counted.

When a fire starts, think and act safely. Pull the fire alarm and call 911. Try to put out the fire only if you have been trained to use extinguishers, and the fire is small and tame enough to be extinguished by a hand-held extinguisher. Evacuate the building through the closest exit.

The specific causes and agents contributing to fires will differ, as will the methods to fight fires. Because of this, the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) has classified fires into four types. Fire extinguishers should be labeled with the classes of fires they extinguish. Use the following chart to understand the classifications of fire and the corresponding classifications of fire extinguishers.

Class:	Materials burned in fire:	Extinguishing agent for fire:
A	wood, paper, rubber, plastics	water, dry chemicals
B	flammable liquids, gases, greases	carbon dioxide, dry chemicals
C	electrical equipment, wiring, fuse boxes, circuit breakers, machinery	carbon dioxide, dry chemicals
D	combustible metals	special techniques, do not use common extinguishers

If you use a fire extinguisher, be sure to use one only on fires for which that fire extinguisher is designed. Using the wrong agent on a fire may increase the intensity of the fire. There are only two dry chemical extinguishers that can be used on A, B, and C fires, and those are multi-purpose ABC extinguishers, either stored pressure or cartridge operated. Multi-purpose extinguishers (ABC) will handle all A, B, and C fires. All fire extinguishers are labeled with either ABC, or A, or B, or C, so be sure to read the label.

If the fire can be contained or extinguished, a properly trained person should use the right extinguisher on the blaze. When using a typical extinguisher, follow the 'PASS' method. Hold the extinguisher upright, and:

- Pull the pin, stand back eight or ten feet.
- Aim at the base of the fire.

- Squeeze the handle.
- Sweep at the base of the fire with the extinguishing agent.

If you aim high at the flames, you won't put out the fire. Remember, too, that most extinguishers have a very limited operation time, only 8-10 seconds, so you have to act fast and spray correctly at the base of the fire, not at smoke or flames.

If the fire is out of control, the combustible material is unknown, or you have not been trained in the proper use of extinguishers, leave the firefighting to professionals with the proper equipment. In this case, sound the fire alarm, and then call for emergency help from a safe place.

What to Do In Case Of Fire

The following points are suggested responses and steps to take in the event of a fire:

1. **Be aware of smoke and noxious fumes, and avoid them in the following ways.** Fumes can enter the lungs and leave a person unconscious and at the mercy of flames. All fires consume oxygen to burn. Most victims of a fire suffocate from lack of oxygen. They are unconscious or dead before flames consume them. Do the following:

- Inside a building that is in flames, you should shut all doors within your reach.
- Outside, get away from the direction of the flames and smoke to avoid inhaling smoke and fumes.
- If you are trapped in a building, and you can make your way to an exit, get to your hands and knees and crawl. This is important because smoke and heat rise rapidly, and you will inhale less smoke near the floor.

2. **Avoid panic.** Although fire is a panic situation, when one panics, dangerous mistakes can be made. Stay calm, assess the extent of the blaze, call the fire department, and act quickly to contain or extinguish the blaze.

3. **Take the proper steps as quickly as possible.** Time is of the essence in fire fighting. The smaller the fire, the easier it is to extinguish. Be prepared to respond quickly by knowing and using:

- your Department's emergency procedures;
- the location of fire alarms and extinguishers;
- your nearest fire exit.

- **Use a shield.** In any fire situation inside a building, anything you can use, any type of shield, heavy blankets, or tarps, will help you get out of the building with less risk of injury. A wet cloth or handkerchief over your nose will help cut down the smoke intake.

SEVERE WEATHER

Other than fires, severe weather emergencies are the most common emergency situations that occur. Severe weather includes any of the following, depending on which part of the country you live in, and each requires a different response:

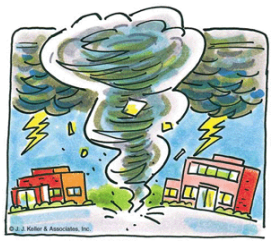
- hurricanes;
- tornadoes;
- heat; and
- snow or extreme cold weather conditions.

Hurricanes

Although hurricanes can be extremely destructive and dangerous, at least they gather force and strike slowly enough that companies in affected areas almost always have time to prepare for their arrival and to inform employees what they are expected to do. Depending on the storm's intensity, your department may close for the duration, put up special defenses, or provide emergency shelter if the structure is strong. Please reference the City's Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan and Personnel Procedure, Chapter XI, Section 6 for more information on the City's emergency procedures.

Tornadoes

Very little, if any, warning is usually available for a tornado. However, the City monitors when weather conditions are right to breed tornadoes.



When the City learns of the approach of a tornado to the immediate vicinity, an alarm will sound to direct people to go to designated safety areas, usually in the most interior areas of the building, including windowless areas built of cinder block or other strong materials. As soon as a tornado alarm sounds, you should evacuate to the designated safe area in an orderly manner.

Heat

Heat can be another severe weather condition, especially in the southern and western parts of the U.S. Sometimes electricity shortages mean that some businesses do not have access to air conditioning even when necessary. Your department may have to alter operations in this type of emergency situation. If they do, find out what they plan on doing.

Meanwhile, some general ways to help you cope with severe heat at work and at home include the following:

- wear light-colored clothing of a light-weight, breathable fabric;
- if you must be in the sun, wear sun protection of SPF 30 UV or above and re apply frequently;
- drink lots of fresh water, even more than normal (this will help your body cope with the heat);
- do not go outside in the sun for long;
- do not physically exert yourself any more than necessary; and
- if you do not have access to air conditioning at home, during the day go to a public place like a mall or library that is air-conditioned, and at night, sleep in the coolest part of your house you can find.

Earthquakes

Earthquakes are a natural disaster that we usually cannot predict, and which occurs most frequently near fault lines in the earth's crust. Check to see if your Department has any special policies or procedures regarding earthquakes.

Because of the unpredictability of earthquakes, if you live in an affected area, you should keep the following on hand, both at home and at work:

- a small flashlight and portable radio;
- first aid kit (and know how to use it);
- a week's supply of any special medications;
- a spare set of eye glasses;
- heavy shoes to walk outside in after a quake.

In addition to the preparations you can take beforehand, there are some basic rules to follow *during* an earthquake:

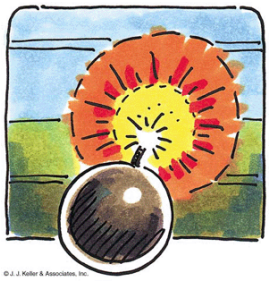
- stay indoors (do not run outdoors; studies have shown that most injuries occur as people are entering or leaving a building);
- take cover by going under a desk, table, bench, against an inside wall or wood-framed doorway, and hold on;
- stay away from glass windows, outside doors or walls, and anything that could fall and hurt you, like lighting or fixtures;
- be prepared for aftershocks;
- do not use candles, lighters, matches, or other open flames during or immediately after an earthquake, because of potential gas leaks (use open flames only after gas leaks have been ruled out after the end of the quake);
- remain calm;

- hang up all phones.

Bomb Threats

The incidents at the World Trade Center in New York City and the Federal Building in Oklahoma City have taught us the real threat and destructive force of bombs in offices. An unfortunate fact of modern life is the threat of terrorist action in the form of bombs. Especially in big city office towers, bomb threats have become an all-too-frequent occurrence.

Some important tips to help you deal with bomb threats in the office include the following:



- take every bomb threat seriously;
- if you are the one who answers the phone, get as much information as possible about the threat received (time, date, voice description, etc.);
- immediately notify a supervisor or the safety manager of the bomb threat;
- participate in a calm and orderly evacuation of the premises (do not search for a bomb unless instructed by police to look for foreign or suspicious objects);
- if you find something that looks suspicious and you think it may be a bomb, do not touch it; treat it the same as a bomb threat and notify the appropriate person.