

Emergency Action Plans

Having an Emergency Action Plan (EAP) is a very important part of any safety program. But, what is an EAP and why do you need one? Second question first. If you are in the construction industry (governed by the OSHA 1926 standards you are required to have an EAP. Title 29, Section 1926.35 of the Code of Federal Regulations is the governing standard. This standard sets out the parameters of an EAP. But, while compliance with all of the OSHA standards that apply to your business is essential there is a more practical reason for EAPs. That practical reason is the safety of your employees. And in my book, safety comes first. So, if we can conclude that you are going to have an EAP for the safety of your employees, it should be one that complies with the OSHA standard.

The OSHA standard for EAPs sets out certain requirements for your EAP. I am not going to take up space by listing each requirement with its specific subsection, but you can conclude that each of these requirements is set out in the OSHA standard, 1926.35. The minimum elements of an EAP are:

- 1.) Emergency Escape Procedures and emergency escape route assignments.
- 2.) Procedures to be followed for employees who remain behind to operate critical operations before they evacuate.
- 3.) Procedures to account for all employees after evacuation.
- 4.) Rescue and medical duties for those employees who are to perform them.
- 5.) Preferred means of reporting fires and other emergencies.
- 6.) Names or job titles of individuals who can be contacted for further information or explanations of the plan.

In addition you are required to establish an alarm system and to have different alarms for different situations. You also must, in your EAP establish the types of evacuations to be used in emergency circumstances. So, you may need a different evacuation plan for different types of situations and the types and locations of hazards that might necessitate an evacuation.

Finally, there is a training requirement. Before implementing that plan you are required to designate and train a sufficient number of employees to assist in a safe and orderly evacuation. In addition, you are to review the plan with each employee covered by the plan when the plan is developed, whenever an employee's responsibilities or designations under the plan are changed, and whenever the plan is changed.

The preceding sounds pretty basic and simple. The EAP has been a question on past Theodore H. Brodie Safety Award applications. In many cases companies have indicated that they have an EAP, but it is a "one size fits all" EAP. As you can see from the preceding, ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL when it comes to an EAP. As a contractor every

facility in which you work is different. The hazards are different, the best escapes routes are definitely different, the locations of gathering areas will be different and the available alarm systems will be different. So, while you may have an EAP requirement in your safety program, it should provide a mandate to create a site specific EAP for each project and location at which you have employees. That outline should be very general and designed to provide guidance for the site specific plan, but to allow the individual designing the plan the necessary latitude to create a broad, simple to understand and comprehensive EAP for the site on which they will be working.

But, before we get too deeply into the “weeds” of the site specific EAP consider something else which should be part of the site specific plan. Section 1926.50 covers the requirements for medical services and first aid for your employees. This standard mandates that you ensure the availability of medical personnel for advice and consultation on matters concerning occupational health and that prior to the commencement of the project you have made provisions for the prompt medical attention in the case of serious injury on the job. Section 1926.50(c) requires that in the absence of an infirmary, clinic, hospital or physician that is reasonably accessible in terms of time and distance to the jobsite, you must have a person on site with a valid certificate in first aid from the U. S. Bureau of Mines, the American Red Cross or equivalent. All of this contact information and critical locations and telephone numbers should also be part of your EAP.

So, now we have established the parameters for your EAP how should you proceed. This is really not too complicate.

- 1.) Before the first crew member arrives on the jobsite the project manager, superintendent, foreman or the person who will be in charge of the project should arrive at the site.
- 2.) He/she should survey the location with a representative of your customer and identify all possible hazards that might confront your crew on the site. These might include natural hazards (tornados, hurricanes, ice storms, etc.), man-made hazards (toxic fluid or gas leaks, fires, explosions, etc.), workplace violence, active shooter situations and any other hazard he/she may become aware of.
- 3.) Establish a gathering area outside the facility or work location to which your employees may evacuate (in the case of natural hazards your customer might have a safe location within their facility, such as a tornado shelter)/
- 4.) Consider where each hazard might occur and identify a primary and secondary evacuation route from your employees work area to the identified gathering location that will provide maximum protection for your employees while they are evacuating.

- 5.) He/she should identify which alarm system will be used to warn your employees of the need to evacuate and who will be responsible of making the decision for your employees to evacuate their work area and communicate that decision to your employees.
- 6.) He/she should identify any of your employees who might be engaged in tasks that will require them to shut down equipment before they can evacuate and then train those employee identifies on their tasks.
- 7.) He/she should identify emergency service providers in the area and list information regarding their location as well as all necessary contact information.
- 8.) He/she should identify which of your employees on the jobsite will be in charge of notifying the main or branch office and taking a head count of your employees at the gathering area.
- 9.) He/she should identify sufficient management personnel to have back-ups in case the primary responsible person leaves the site. They should also establish a procedure of communicating to the entire crew any time the primary responsible person leaves the site and who the temporary responsible person will be.
- 10.) He/she should set up a means and schedule to communicate the site specific plan to all employees to whom it will apply and a mechanism to document the training and to periodically audit employees to ensure they continue to be aware of the plan.
- 11.) In the case of a long term project h/she should work with the customer's representative to perform drills of the plan.
- 12.) He/she at some point should coordinate your EAP with your customer and with any other contractors on the site with your employees.

The preceding is not intended to be all inclusive, but to make you aware of the need to have a site specific EAP for each jobsite on which you will be working. Please remember that the detailed requirements of 1926.35 and 1926.50 are subject to the interpretation of any OSHA compliance officer as to your plan. So, if you have the misfortune of having an accident on one of your sites which results in a review of your EAP for the site by an OSHA compliance officer he/she might conclude that your plan is insufficient to cover all of the possible hazards which could have existed on your site and which, in their opinion you should have been aware.

Also, be aware that some of these requirements may have been modified by a state OSHA plan if you are working in a state-plan state. The same caution applies if you are working on a site covered by MSHA. We are aware of at least one requirement under MSHA that establishes a 15 minute reporting requirement in the case of an accident on a site covered by MSHA. Many of our members may never have the occasion to work in a state-plan OSHA state or on a project covered by the MSHA, but we want you to always be

aware of the myriad of regulations that apply to you concerning the safety and health of your employees. Always start with an assessment of what it will take to keep your employees as safe as possible from all possible hazards they may face.