

## **Where Are the Exits? Your Employees Should Know**

Would your employees know where all the exits are in case their first choice was too crowded or it was not available because of the emergency?

Maybe they work in a small office or a small building, while others might be in a large complex with many exits. Are you sure the doors will be unlocked when they get there, or is there something blocking the hall or pathway to the exit?

Knowing the answers to these questions could keep your employees safe in an emergency. The time to think about it is now, so in case of an emergency they would not waste precious minutes looking around for a clear exit. Here's how to achieve this.

Exit routes should be continuous and unobstructed paths of escape from any point within a workplace to a place of safety.

Exit route doors must remain unlocked during business hours, and they must be free of any devices that could restrict them from opening in case the device, for example a lock, should fail.

Side-hinged doors should open in the direction of travel if the number of occupants exceeds 50 or if the room is high-hazard. Ceilings of the exit route must be at least 7 feet 6 inches high and exit access must be at least 28 inches wide.

Keep exit routes free of obstructions as well as explosive or flammable materials. Lighting for exits routes should be adequate and exit signs should be posted in plainly legible letters.

You will want to have an emergency alarm system to alert employees in case of an event. If you have 10 or fewer workers, you may communicate your plan orally.

However, if you have more workers, the plan must be in writing, under OSHA rules. OSHA recommends that every business have an emergency action plan.

### **Action plan elements**

Emergency action plan elements should include:

- Procedures for reporting fires and other emergencies.
- Emergency evacuation procedures and exit route assignments.
- Critical operations procedures for employees who stay behind.
- Procedures to account for all employees after evacuation.
- Procedures for staff performing rescue and medical duties.
- Name and job title of staff to contact for plan information.
- Alarm system to warn employees.

- Designating and training employees to assist in a safe and orderly evacuation for other workers.

### **What you can do**

You may want to have a few employees work on the emergency action plan, preferably one from each department. Review the plan with employees when it is completed, if staff responsibilities change and after any aspect of the plan is updated.

Hold emergency evacuation drills to test your plan.

Consider having a supervisor go to individual employees periodically and hand them a red chip or card. Those who received one would need to explain the procedures and the exit they would go to at that very moment.

Emergencies can happen at any time. Ensure that your employees are prepared at all times.

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