

Fire Drills

Does OSHA require that fire drills be conducted in General Industry. The answer is NO. That being said, it is still a good idea to conduct fire drills on occasion. I always tried to conduct drills once a year. You never know when a fire might develop at your facility. If so, having a trained work force can only help improve the reaction to the emergency.

I have conducted announced drills and unannounced drills. Both can be affective but I personally like the unannounced drill the best. To properly conduct an unannounced drill, you need to coordinate the event with a few coworkers. First of all, if there are critical operations/production going at the time of the drill you need to make sure this drill is coordinated with top management. On occasion I have allowed a few people to stay at there work station during the drill. I verbally will quiz these employees as to how they should react during the drill.

My objective for the fire drill is to get everyone out of the facility as quickly and as safe as possible. There may be some operations that need to be placed in a safe position before exiting the facility. When this happens, you need to be very clear as to the expectations. The employee needs to understand exactly what is required to put the operation into a safe position. We do not want to create another incident worse than the current one. The employee will place the operation in safe condition only if the fire emergency will allow it. There needs to be a clear written procedure in place for the employees to follow.

Take a look at your emergency action plan or evacuation plan. Review the contents and update as required. Review the plan seriously just as an OSHA Inspector or and auditor might look at it. Conduct refresher training to make sure all employees understand what to do when during a fire emergency. A drill can identify flaws and gives you the opportunity to take corrective actions to eliminate the flaws in the plan. Regular fire drills ensure that the system works well all the time and people are confident about using it.

Evaluate:

- 1) That employees evacuate the building quickly and safely during a real emergency
- 2) Gaps in you plan
- 3) Test your alarm system
- 4) Worksite and determine if the appropriate fire warning system is in place
- 5) Worksite and determine if more emergency lighting is needed; exits; signs, alarms
- 6) Emergency escapes routes located in the facility
- 7) Procedures for employees who remain on site after the alarm sounds
- 8) Rescue and emergency duties
- 9) Worst case scenarios

At a minimum, your emergency action plan must include the following:

- A preferred method for reporting fires and other emergencies;
- An evacuation policy and procedure;
- Emergency escape procedures & route assignments, such as floor plans, workplace maps, and safe or refuge areas; Names, titles, departments, and telephone numbers of individuals both within and outside your company to contact for additional information or explanation of duties and responsibilities under the emergency plan;
- Procedures for employees who remain to perform or shut down critical plant operations, operate fire extinguishers, or perform other essential services that cannot be shut down for every emergency alarm before evacuating; and
- Rescue and medical duties for any workers designated to perform them.

The goal of an emergency evacuation plan is to ensure all employees and visitors get out of the facility safely and all are accounted for after evacuation.

Questions? Contact The Redstone Group at 614-763-5034 x7007 or jwilliams@redstonegrp.com