

Office Emergency Action Plans

What Every Employee and Employer Should Know

What is an Emergency Action Plan?

Emergency Action Plans, or EAPs, are the plans every office must have in place to deal with emergency situations. All employing offices in Congress, including every committee and every personal office of a Member, are required by the Congressional Accountability Act of 1995 to have an EAP. EAPs must be updated regularly, and every employee should be familiar with their contents.

It should be kept in mind that for Committees and the offices of Members of Congress, your EAP only needs to deal with emergency procedures *within* your own office. Capitol campus-wide issues – like when to put on your escape hoods or when to evacuate – are the responsibility of the Capitol Police and House and Senate authorities. Your EAP needs to explain what happens **inside** the walls of your office: how to get out of the office during an emergency; where office escape hoods are located; and where supplies are stored for sheltering in place.

EAPs vary in complexity according to the size and needs of the individual office, but all share at a minimum a few common elements:

- Escape procedures and escape route assignments for staff
- Procedures for staff who must perform critical operations before evacuation (if applicable)
- Assembly areas for staff once outside of the building
- Procedures to account for all staff after an evacuation

- Means for reporting emergencies
- Assignment of rescue and medical duties
- Persons to contact for more information

An EAP should also designate which employee(s) is responsible for coordinating emergency response activities and planning.

What Should Every Employee Know About EAPs?

As an individual, the first thing you should do to prepare for an emergency is to maintain a basic knowledge of your office's emergency action plan. Read your office's EAP and find out who your office emergency coordinator is. If your office does not have one, consider volunteering. Next, be sure you understand how and when you might have to leave your office and how you will know if that is necessary. Most importantly, be sure you know how to exit the building, which exits and stair wells are closest to your office, and where alternate exits are located if the main exits are blocked or impassible. Last, be sure to know where your office will gather once the building is evacuated.

Keep in mind that not all emergencies will call for an evacuation. There may be certain instances in which it is preferable to stay within the confines of the office or some other safe area and shelter in place rather than go outside. Be sure you are familiar with your office's plans for such a contingency and where you should go if you must shelter in place.



What Should Every Employer Know About EAPs?

First and foremost, *all Congressional offices are required by law* to have a written emergency action plan. It is critical that all offices train their employees and ensure that they are knowledgeable about the office EAP. Each office should also designate an office emergency coordinator (or coordinators) who can keep the EAP up to date, train staff in emergency procedures, and help other staff during an evacuation.

Be thorough and comprehensive when planning the office EAP and other emergency policies. Bare-bones plans may meet the minimum legal requirements, but there are many different contingencies to

consider. For example, in case your office is required to shelter in place rather than leave the building, it is useful to keep a basic supply of food and water on hand for staff. You may also want to maintain contact lists of employees in case staff become separated or need to be contacted at home. Also, consider making backups of critical information (like computer files) and keep them off-site in case an evacuation results in a prolonged absence from your office.

Where Can I Find Resources on Emergency Planning and Creating an EAP?

If you want more information on emergency preparedness, contact the Capitol Police and House or Senate authorities. For more information on writing an EAP, contact the Office of Compliance, or go to our web site at www.compliance.gov. Our web site has resources and detailed instructions on how to write an EAP, including a new form-fillable template that allows you to quickly customize a plan for your office. The instructions and the template are all in our new "eResources" section of the site. To get to *eResources*, click on the *Forms and Publications* tab on our home page.

Need to Create an EAP for Your Office?



Go to Our Web Site to Access Our New Form-Fillable EAP Template



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