



# NATURAL DISASTERS

FAST FACTS

MARCH 2020



Natural disasters such as floods, blizzards, extreme heat, earthquakes, hurricanes, tornadoes, or even pandemic flu, as well as man-made events including shootings, terrorism, air pollutants, office fires, transportation accidents, chemical spills, or cyber-attacks, can wreak havoc on a workplace. The best defense to any of these emergency situations is a strong offense—a workplace with an emergency preparedness plan.

## WHY SHOULD YOUR OFFICE PREPARE?

Most employers are legally required to establish and implement a workplace plan to protect employees during emergencies. Setting in place advanced contingency plans helps to:

- reduce fear and anxiety;
- ensure an adequate supply of available resources;
- protect people, assets, and production time; and
- allow for the continuation of organizational operations in an interim situation or as soon as possible once the emergency has concluded.

## THE EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT CYCLE IS COMPRISED OF 4 DISTINCT PHASES:

- ① MITIGATION
- ② PREPAREDNESS
- ③ RESPONSE
- ④ RECOVERY

## HOW DO YOU BEGIN THE EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS PROCESS?

**The Emergency Management Cycle is comprised of four distinct phases:**

### 1 MITIGATION

Mitigation is the process of identifying potential vulnerabilities in your office should an emergency occur and taking steps to eliminate and/or control the level of risk associated with those vulnerabilities. The mitigation process might include understanding what types of disasters are common or may occur in your geographic area; identifying existing and potential hazards; and implementing changes and procedures that would eliminate the vulnerabilities or, at a minimum, lessen the impact of the risks associated with them.

### 2 PREPAREDNESS

It is important to create and implement an Emergency Action Plan (EAP). The EAP details the procedures and responsibilities that will be executed in the event of an emergency. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration standards (29 CFR § 1910.38) require employers with 10 or more employees to have a written EAP to assist in times of disaster. Per the regulation, the plan must include:

- procedures for reporting a fire or other emergency;
- procedures for emergency evacuation, including type of evacuation and exit route assignments;
- procedures to be followed by employees who remain to operate critical plant operations before they evacuate;
- procedures to account for all employees after evacuation; procedures to be followed by employees performing rescue or medical duties; and the name or job title of every employee who may be contacted by employees who need more information about the plan or an explanation of their duties under the plan.

Additionally, an employer must have and maintain an alarm system; designate and train employees to aid in a safe and orderly evacuation for those employees who may need assistance; and periodically review the EAP, specifically when employee responsibilities change or when the EAP is amended. When creating your EAP, include employees from a variety of roles within the office and be sure to include anyone with a disability, impairment, or other limitation to ensure their needs are also covered. It is recommended to create a plan for emergency payroll and other financial decisions in the midst of an emergency as well as a management succession to account for employees who may not be able to report to work. Consider a clear communication channel for employees—not only should you include a means for informing employees about work status, but it also may be advisable to provide an out-of-town number that allows employees to leave a message in case of an emergency. It also may be appropriate to maintain a secure location to store originals or duplicate copies of accounting records, legal documents, your employees' emergency contact lists, and other essential records.

Also consider communications that are necessary to alert constituents, vendors, or any visitors who may be coming to your office. Include in the EAP a means for addressing third-party contacts and the public about the status of your office and a point of contact with contact information, if possible, during the emergency situation. It also may be advisable to coordinate with stakeholders such as emergency management offices, the United States Capitol Police (USCP), local government officials, and first responders regarding other communications that may be specific to your office.

#### **Equipping the office with emergency supplies.**

Offices are encouraged to create emergency supply kits and keep them in shelter locations. Consider stocking emergency supplies such as water, food, blankets, etc. and ask employees to have a personal kit with any necessary medications and other supplies (e.g., contact solution) they may need over a 24-hour period. Other supplies that you may consider include, but are not limited to, a first-aid kit, battery-operated radio, flashlights, and extra batteries. Each office should determine what precautions would be most relevant and plan accordingly. For a printable checklist and further reference, see <https://www.ready.gov/kit>.

Consider if any documents or electronic devices should be collected in an emergency, assuming it is safe to do so, and designate one primary and possibly a secondary employee if the primary is not available. Although not required by federal law in the majority of workplaces, it may be advisable to have one or more people trained to adequately render first aid and CPR and to have appropriate first-aid tools and supplies readily available for emergency access in the office. ANSI/ISEA Z308.1– 2015: American National Standards Institute – Minimum Requirements for Workplace First Aid Kits and Supplies provides guidance to employers on what should be included in a workplace first-aid kit.

### **Training employees on what to do and how to react in an emergency**

It is important to effectively train employees regarding the EAP by conducting live drills and exercises to ensure that all workers know the procedures and protocols in case of an emergency and to have an opportunity to ask questions or clarify responsibilities. Live drills and exercises will help employees become familiar with the specific EAP for your office and will reduce confusion and injuries during an emergency. Training should also incorporate stakeholders such as USCP and fire and emergency medical services personnel to familiarize them with your procedures and workplace-specific needs. Evacuation plans should be practiced on a regular basis and reevaluated annually to ensure they are accurate and up-to-date.

### **Ensuring that all workers know what to do in case of an emergency**

Ensure employees know and fully understand what to do in case of any emergency situation: an evacuation, a shelter-in-place situation, or a medical emergency. Employees should know – and be able to access – emergency contact numbers, emergency evacuation routes, all assembly points, and shelter-in-place locations. It is also highly advisable for employees in the legislative branch to wear their badges at all times to assist first responders in an emergency situation. Check in on persons with disabilities and those that will be assisting them to ensure all parties know specific plans for assistance. Encourage employees to follow office procedures to check in with the office's emergency coordinator, and use text or social media when reaching out to friends, family, etc. Employees should prepare at home for pets, children, family members, etc. – an emergency may require employees to remain sheltered for extended periods of time.

## **3 RESPONSE**

The response phase happens when the emergency hits and involves initiating the EAP and coordinating with first responders, state and local governments, and private sector stakeholders.

## **4 RECOVERY**

Recovery is the process of assessing the impact of the emergency on the workplace and determining next steps. Once the workplace is re-opened, it is important to evaluate what known vulnerabilities were exploited and assess if any new vulnerabilities were exposed. Conduct an "After Action Review" with stakeholders to evaluate how to respond to identified weaknesses and shortcomings and update your EAP accordingly. It is also important to consider what additional support may be necessary for your employees after an emergency. Flexible work arrangements for employees who may need to attend to personal and family obligations may be encouraged; however, it is also advisable to communicate expectations and a schedule for how work routines will be reestablished.

### **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:**

- OCWR resources on how to host a safety meeting
- OCWR PowerPoint on emergency training

### **OTHER FEDERAL RESOURCES INCLUDE:**

- Department of Homeland Security website with resources
- Federal Emergency Management Agency has resources on emergency response plans as well as emergency preparedness resources and other materials
- Department of Labor printable evacuation plan and procedure tool with checklist to aid in creating an emergency action plan