Four Steps in the Emergency Planning Process

Every year emergencies take their toll on business and industry - in lives and dollars lost. Business and industry can limit injuries and damages and return more quickly to normal operations, if they plan ahead. This handout outlines the four steps recommended by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to follow in setting up a comprehensive emergency management program.

Step 1 - Establish a Planning Team

- Form the Team. The team should be comprised of employees from all primary work areas, such as production, maintenance, and office staff. It is important for the team to have members from the general workforce as well as from mid-level and upper-level management.

- Issue a Mission Statement. The team should develop an overall mission statement for the team and the emergency plan.

- Establish Authority. The team should be empowered by top-level management, with clearly defined roles and responsibilities. Such empowerment will help to demonstrate management's commitment to the project.

- Establish a Schedule and Budget. To be effective, there should be defined outcomes, target dates for plan development, training, and implementation, as well as as allocations to address costs for implementing the plan.

Step 2 - Analyze Capabilities and Hazards

- Establish a Baseline. A review of existing plans, policies, and practices should be conducted to determine what degree of emergency preparedness exists at the facility. Existing risk evaluations should also be reviewed to determine if there are exposures already known, such as fires, severe storms, etc.

- Meet with Outside Groups. Solicit input from the Local Emergency Management Agency, fire department, etc. to determine if they have established plans that would integrate into the facility's plans.

- Conduct a Threat Assessment. Using information from the baseline and outside authorities, conduct a review of the facility to identify the possible emergencies that can occur. The goal should be to develop an "all hazards" plan, which addresses all foreseeable emergencies. Make sure to review the products, materials, and processes on site to determine if they could contribute to or escalate an emergency.

- Identify Codes and Regulations. Many federal, state, and local codes have pre-emergency planning requirements.

- Identify Resources. Knowing what internal and external resources (i.e., equipment, people, and knowledge) that are or will be available during an emergency is critical to plan development. Part of this process should include a review with the business's insurer to identify what resources they can provide for plan development and post-emergency recovery.

- Estimate Likelihood of Each Emergency. Like any other risk management process, an emergency plan requires an analysis of the probability of a specific emergency occurring and estimated possible harm (i.e., human impact, property damage, business impact, etc.) and outcomes. These will also assist the team to prioritize their efforts.

Step 3 - Develop the Plan

- Outline Plan Components. An "all hazards" plan should include a number of key elements, including an executive summary (addressing purpose, scope, and authorities), plan elements (e.g., direction and control, communication, administration), response procedures (i.e., actions to be taken for each emergency), and supporting documents (e.g., emergency contact numbers, vendor phone numbers, repair service information, facility drawings, utility information).

- Identify Challenges and Prioritize Activities. Determine specific goals and milestones. Make a list of tasks to be performed, by whom and when. Determine how you will address the problem areas and resource shortfalls that were identified in the threat assessment.

- Write the Plan. Break the plan elements up between the team and have each team member write a 1st draft addressing assigned element(s). Then, using the in-house and available outside resources, develop the first draft of the responses for each emergency.

- Develop a Revision and Implementation Schedule. Once the first drafts are done, a revision and implementation schedule should be developed that keeps the team focused and moving forward. The goal should be to have a 2nd draft in place as quickly as possible.

- Conduct a Table-Top Exercise. Once a 2nd draft has been developed, the team should run table-top simulations to see where there may be gaps in the plan. Once these gaps are identified and corrected, the final revision of the plan can be written.

- Develop a Training Program. The best plan will be ineffective without a reliable training program to teach employees what they should do in the event of an emergency. Initial training might simply be a plan review, with follow-up training including exercises simulating real emergencies.

- Coordinate Plan with Outside Organizations. After the plan is tested internally, and revised as needed, outside agencies (i.e., fire, police, etc.) should be asked to review the plan and provide comments.

Step 4 - Implement the Plan

- Present the Plan. Using the training plans previously developed, the emergency plan should be presented to the workforce. It is usually best to present the plan to mid-level management and those with specific roles defined in the plan first. That way, when the general workforce receives the training, those persons with responsibilities will be better positioned to answer questions.

- Integrate the Plan into Operations. The plan needs to be dynamic and part of the routine function of the facility (i.e., part of the daily operations of the facility). Plan status and potential threats should be a line item on regular production, maintenance, and planning meetings.

- Exercises. After the workforce has had time to understand the plan, routine exercises should be conducted to test the plan and keep the emergency response program forefront in everyone's mind. Exercises should start simple and grow in detail with time.

- Evaluate and Modify the Plan. The plan should be reviewed for functionality after each exercise, any time there is a facility change, or whenever new threats are discovered.

For more detailed information on each of the steps, see *Emergency Management Guide for Business and Industry*, which is available from the FEMA's website at http://www.fema.gov/business/guide/index.shtm.