

Emergency Plans in the Workplace



This factsheet outlines the obligations on persons conducting a business or undertaking (PCBUs) to prepare and maintain an emergency plan for fixed workplaces.

Duty to prepare emergency plans

The Work Health and Safety Regulations 2011 (Cth) form part of a system of nationally harmonised occupational health and safety laws. According to regulation 43, PCBUs must ensure that an emergency plan is prepared, maintained and implemented for the workplace. An emergency plan is a written set of instructions that outlines the procedure that should be taken in an emergency. It must include:

- emergency procedures (including an effective response to an emergency);
- evacuation procedures;
- notifying emergency service organisations at the earliest opportunity;
- medical treatment and assistance;
- effective communication between the person authorised to coordinate the emergency response and all people at the workplace;
- testing of the emergency procedures (including the frequency of testing); and
- information, training and instruction to relevant workers in relation to implementing the emergency procedures.

The maximum penalty for failing to prepare an emergency plan is \$6,000 for individuals and \$30,000 in the case of a body corporate.

Relevant factors that must be considered

According to the regulations, PCBUs must have regard to all relevant matters, including:

- the nature of the work being carried out at the workplace;
- the nature of the hazards at the workplace;
- the size and location of the workplace (including remoteness or proximity to health services); and
- the number and composition of the workers and other persons at the workplace (such as visitors or contractors).

In light of these considerations, it is not necessary for your emergency plan to be detailed or complex. It should be easy to understand for all of your staff and must be tailored to your specific workplace.

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Types of emergencies

The types of emergencies that can arise include fire, explosions, medical emergencies, incidents with hazardous chemicals, bomb threats, missing child, armed confrontations and natural disasters.

Not all of these emergencies will be relevant to your workplace and therefore you should consider conducting a practical assessment of the hazards in your workplace and the likely consequences of an emergency arising. Any external hazards should also be considered.

Other inclusions

Other information which you might consider containing in your emergency plan include:

- emergency contact details for key personnel who have specific roles under the emergency plan (e.g. fire wardens, floor wardens, first aid officers);
- contact details for local emergency services;
- a description of the mechanisms that are in place to alert persons that there is an emergency (e.g. sirens, bells, alarms);
- a map of the workplace which identifies the location of safety equipment, emergency exits and assembly points; and
- a post-incident follow-up process (e.g. counselling, medical treatment).

Higher-risk workplaces

There are additional requirements for higher risk workplaces such as:

- workplaces with confined spaces;
- workplaces that use harness systems;
- workplaces that handle or manage asbestos;
- workplaces that store or handle hazardous chemicals; and
- workplaces that carry out demolition and refurbishment sites.

For further information about these requirements, please call the NRA Hotline on 1800 RETAIL (738 245).

Access to emergency plans

Once your emergency plan has been prepared, it should be made readily accessible by your staff or at least on display in a visible place. If your emergency plan is quite detailed, you might want to consider writing a summary of the key elements and posting these around the workplace.

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Training

There is also a need to ensure that workers are adequately trained in executing the emergency procedures. These arrangements must be contained in the emergency plan itself and may include such things as practising evacuations, identifying assembly points, locating emergency equipment and practising first aid. Other ideas that you might like to consider include:

- the inclusion of training in induction courses for new workers;
- the provision of refresher training sessions for existing workers;
- the provision of refresher training sessions for short-term contractors or visitors; and
- the provision of specific training for individuals in a specific role (e.g. fire wardens must be adequately trained for the workplace circumstances).

Shared workplaces

In shared workplaces (such as a shopping centre, construction site or office building), PCBU's must consult and co-ordinate activities with all other persons who have a work health and safety duty. Usually in these cases, a master emergency plan will be created for all PCBU's to use.

Reviewing emergency plans

There is an obligation on PCBU's to ensure that their emergency plans are current and effective. The maximum penalty for failing to maintain an emergency plan is \$6,000 for individuals and \$30,000 in the case of a body corporate. Therefore, employers are advised to review their emergency plans on a regular basis and on occasions where:

- there are changes to the workplace such as re-location or refurbishments;
- there are changes in the number or composition of staff, including an increase in the use of temporary contractors;
- new activities have been introduced to staff; or
- the plan has been tested and requires improvement.

Further sources of information

For more information and resources related to workplace health and safety, please visit the Safe Work Australia website.

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Disclaimer

This fact sheet provides general information only and should not be used as a substitute for seeking professional legal advice for your specific circumstances. If you have queries in relation to the information contained in this fact sheet, please call the NRA Hotline on 1800 RETAIL (738 245).