

Emergency Evacuation and Planning *If you fail to prepare – prepare to fail!*

September is National Preparedness Month, however you should be prepared for emergencies every day. Emergencies, such as fires or chemical spills, are unpredictable and often happen when least expected. It is important to know what to do in the event of an emergency.

Planning

Waiting until an emergency occurs is not the time to begin planning. Preparing ahead of time can significantly increase your chances of keeping you and your colleagues safe. Evacuation planning involves:

- Have an exit strategy; always know at least two ways out of your work area and building.
- Designate an assembly area, or rally point, and have a system to account for department members quickly.
- Know emergency and other important telephone numbers.
- Familiarize yourself with your building's evacuation notification system. Some building and floor alarm systems are silent until the fire department confirms an evacuation is necessary, while other building and floor alarm systems will activate automatically.
- Know your building's fire safety systems, such as sprinklers, strobes, and horns.
- Ensure that exit routes are clear and fire doors are kept unlocked and not blocked.
- Review your departmental evacuation plan.

Tips for Success When Talking to Your Team

- **Preparation is Key:** Keep the topic relevant. Work with your team to review emergency evacuation procedures in your workplace and make sure everyone knows what to do and where to go.
- **Stay Positive:** Keep the focus on what can be done to create a safe workplace, instead of focusing on what has gone wrong in the past.
- **Share a Story, Ask for a Story:** Storytelling is a powerful method to convey information. Stories from your employees make the topic even more relatable.

Rescue assistance

Some individuals may be physically unable to evacuate without assistance and it's important to know that they have options. An *area of rescue assistance* should be identified prior to an emergency, which could be in a designated stairwell or in an office behind a closed door. If you or someone you know needs rescue assistance, contact your supervisor or department head to:

- ✓ Review the evacuation options, such as proceeding to the area of rescue assistance or staying in place in a classroom or office to await assistance from emergency personnel.
- ✓ Inform those in your work area about individuals requiring assistance and the location of designated areas of rescue assistance.

So you need to evacuate...

Upon hearing the fire alarm or instructions from the fire department to evacuate, everyone must exit the building. Follow these guidelines to ensure your safety while evacuating:

- Stay calm and do not ignore the alarm!
- Don't be a hero! Never place yourself at risk while assisting with the evacuation of a building.
- If you are willing and able, you may aid others needing rescue assistance.
- Close windows and doors in your area as you exit to prevent the spread of fire and smoke, and encourage others to exit as well.
- Exit the building using stairways and designated evacuation routes – **never use elevators!**
- To prevent spills and slips, do not carry liquids or food with you during an evacuation.
- Proceed to the rally point and await further instructions.
- Inform authorities as soon as possible if there is an individual requiring rescue assistance.
- Never re-enter the building until emergency responders, such as the fire department, say it is safe to do so.

There is fire or smoke in my area, what do I do?!

- ✓ Activate the fire alarm using a pull station
- ✓ Evacuate immediately
- ✓ Call 911 and provide as much detail as possible
- ✓ If you are unsure if the situation is an emergency it is always best to call 911 and let them make a determination

Risk Management Guidance

Risk Management Services can guide your department through the process of developing or updating your building evacuation plan, obtaining exit route maps, and scheduling drills.

Learn more: Complete *Facilities Emergencies and Safety Committee Operations* training at learn.northwestern.edu.

Safety at home – Are you prepared?

It's 2:00am and the smoke alarm goes off. Do you know what to do? There were 364,300 residential building fires in the United States in 2016, half of which happen between 11pm and 7am, according to the National Fire Data Center. By following the guidance below, you can ensure the safety of you and your family in the event you need to vacate your home:

- FEMA recommends testing smoke detectors monthly, changing the batteries annually, and replacing the detectors every 10 years.
- Consider evacuation options for floors above ground level – Can you exit out a 2nd floor window or down an apartment building fire escape ladder?
- If someone in your house needs assistance in evacuating, have a plan in place to get them out.
- Ensure important documentation is easily accessible so you can take it with you as you leave.
- Identify several places you and your family could go if you have to leave your house unexpectedly, such as a neighbor's house or hotel.
- Pets are family too! Be sure to identify places that will accept your furry friends.

For Additional Information

Please contact [Gwen Butler](mailto:Gwen.Butler@northwestern.edu), Director, Environmental Health & Safety, at 847.491.4936 with any questions.

Do you or your team have a safety story you'd like to share? Contact Risk Management Services at gwen.butler@northwestern.edu for details.