

# do **1** thing/BUSINESS

SMALL STEPS TOWARD PREPARING YOUR BUSINESS FOR EMERGENCIES

## Step 11: Test, Train, and Exercise



**THE GOAL:** Make sure employees understand their role in a disaster and are equipped to respond safely and appropriately.

*The disaster environment is fast-paced and stressful. Danger, adrenaline, and exhaustion can affect our ability to carry out critical tasks. Familiarizing your staff with emergency plans and procedures ahead of time through testing, training, and exercising can minimize danger and financial loss in a disaster.*

▶▶▶ CHOOSE ONE OR ALL OF THE FOLLOWING THINGS TO DO THIS MONTH TO PREPARE YOUR BUSINESS FOR A POTENTIAL EMERGENCY:

- ☐ **Train employees on their role in a disaster or emergency.**
- ☐ **Hold a drill or tabletop exercise to test emergency procedures.**
- ☐ **Offer additional safety and response training for staff members.**

From a business standpoint, the time needed for emergency training may seem hard to justify, but workplace training will pay for itself in: fewer accidents, fewer lost work days, and lower workers' compensation costs. It can improve productivity, and it demonstrates to your employees that you care about their safety and that you consider them an important part of the business.

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## ☐ **Train employees on their role in a disaster or emergency.**

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Disasters require people to do things they are not familiar with, and to do them in a fast-moving, high-pressure environment. Provide training to make sure employees are thoroughly familiar with what they are expected to do and why.

- Hold training sessions on continuity and emergency plans.
- Create quick response flip charts or checklists that can be understood at a glance.
- Make sure everyone is comfortable with the training and that they understand what is expected of them.

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## ☐ **Hold a drill or tabletop exercise to test emergency procedures.**

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**THE PURPOSE OF DRILLS AND EXERCISES IS TO TEST PROCEDURES ON WHICH PEOPLE HAVE ALREADY BEEN TRAINED.**

Talking through scenarios can also be a good way to develop plans and procedures, but these should not be considered exercises. Once procedures are developed and employees have been familiarized with them, an exercise can ensure that they can be implemented in an emergency.

**Create a scenario and talk it through with your employees.** For example, what would happen if a tornado hit your facility.

**Test capabilities.** Do they know where the shelter location is at work? Are they following the role that they were assigned in training? Would this be a good plan if this actually took place?

- Go over any suggestions anyone has—the more input the better!
- Use the tabletop or drill to really understand what additional actions should be added to your plans.
- Have participants examined, discuss, and resolve problems based on existing operational plans and identify where those plans need to be refined.
- Create an After Action Report and share it with participants. Consider having your local Emergency Manager look over the report.
- Create a corrective action plan based on lessons learned in the test, and implement it.
- Look at your team, after a tabletop or a drill you might consider changing roles of necessary; you want the employees in a role that they are good at and that they understand.

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After an exercise, be sure to give participants a chance to give feedback and capture any suggestions or lessons learned—and then make changes to the procedures based on that feedback. The most common failure in an exercise program is not adapting procedures to reflect lessons learned.

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## ☐ Offer additional safety and response training for staff members.

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Police, fire and emergency medical personnel are known as “first responders”, but in an emergency the first response often comes from friends, family, and co-workers on the scene. Train your staff in what to do while they wait for emergency personnel to arrive.

- Make sure everyone knows where First Aid Kits, fire extinguishers and other emergency supplies are located.
  - Call the Red Cross to find out about community education; hold a CPR class, or encourage employees to take one.
  - If you have an AED, make sure everyone knows how to use it.
  - Support safety training that will be relevant to the job. FEMA offers free Independent Studies that can familiarize your staff in basic safety and incident command.
  - Make sure that personal protective equipment is available and that staff is familiar with its proper use.
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If your building has more than one entrance, arrange a location to meet responders with the 911 dispatcher. Have someone guide responders to the site of the emergency.

Training should include what employees should do, but it should also include what employees shouldn't do in an emergency. For example, fire extinguisher training should cover how to tell when a fire is too large to put out with an extinguisher. Medical training should include awareness of when it's not safe to try to offer first aid (for instance, if you don't know why someone has collapsed it could be because of chemical fumes or other dangers at their location). Trying to help without proper training and preparation can lead to rescuers becoming victims.

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*Information in this factsheet was adapted from: Surviving Extreme Events: A Guide to Help Small Businesses and Not-for-Profit Organizations Prepare for and Recover from Extreme Events by Daniel J. Alesch and James N. Holly. Available through the Public Entity Risk Institute at <http://www.riskinstitute.org>.*

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