Emergency management
Developing a plan for a small organisation

This information sheet advises small businesses how to prepare a workplace emergency management plan (EMP).

As the owner of a small business you must be prepared for emergency situations that may arise. Putting together an emergency management plan (EMP) will help ensure your workplace is well prepared.

An EMP is a written set of instructions that outlines what your employees should do in the event of an emergency such as a fire, explosion, dangerous chemical release, medical emergency, bomb threat or robbery.

Your plan should be easy to understand, tailored to your workplace and appropriate to the number and type of occupants. Doing a practical assessment of hazards associated with your workplace/work activities – and the possible consequences of an incident occurring as a result of those hazards – will help you prepare a plan.

External hazards may also affect the safety of the workplace – for example, a chemical storage across the road. They too should be considered.

It is important to consult with health and safety representatives (HSRs), if any, and employees when developing your EMP as they may be able to assist in determining the suitability of procedures. Employees and HSRs should also be given training so they know how to respond quickly in emergency situations.

Also ensure your EMP is readily obtainable or on display in the workplace (eg on a noticeboard).

While this information sheet is primarily aimed at smaller organisations (ie those employing 20 or less full-time employees), all organisations need to have an EMP and the following advice can be applied to businesses with more than 20 employees.

When putting together your plan, remember as an employer, you have an obligation to provide a safe workplace not only for employees, but other people such as visitors, customers and contactors.

Use the following checklist to help develop your plan.

Responsibilities
- Has someone with appropriate skills been made responsible for specific actions in an emergency (eg appointment of an area warden)?
- Is there someone responsible for making sure all employees and others in the workplace (eg contractors, customers and visitors) are accounted for in an evacuation? You may use attendance records for this purpose.
- Are specific procedures in place for critical functions such as power shut-off?

Emergency contact details
- Are emergency contact details (relevant to the types of possible threats, eg fire, police, poison information centre) displayed at the workplace in an easily accessible location?
- Are contact details updated regularly?

Work environment
- Is there a mechanism, such as a siren or bell alarm, for alerting staff of an emergency?
- Is there a documented site plan that illustrates the location of fire protection equipment, emergency exits and assembly points?
- If there is a site plan, is it posted in key locations throughout the workplace?
- Are all exits, corridors and aisle ways kept clear of obstructions and does the workplace have illuminated exit signs?
- Are procedures in place for assisting mobility-impaired people?

Fire protection equipment
- Does the workplace have fire protection equipment?
- Is the fire protection equipment suitable for the types of risks at the workplace (eg foam or dry powder type extinguishers for fires that involve flammable liquids)?
- Is equipment regularly tested by a local fire authority or fire equipment supplier?
- Is equipment kept clear of obstructions?
- Are employees trained to use fire extinguishers where required and do they know what type of extinguisher to use for different types of fires?
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**Bushfire danger ratings**
- If your business is located in a bushfire danger area, have you reviewed your existing fire risk controls to ensure they will be effective in bushfire danger conditions?
- Have you reviewed your workplace emergency evacuation procedures for days of declared fire ratings (e.g., code red, catastrophic, extreme, etc.) to include matters such as:
  - safe exit routes (i.e., which roads are open and closed)
  - the closest designated ‘safe place’
  - consistency with the evacuation procedures of the relevant local authorities (the CFA and police)
  - employee access to reliable communications equipment?
- Have your employees been trained in the bushfire emergency evacuation procedures?
- If your employees are required to travel into areas where fire ratings such as code red or extreme may be declared, have you developed appropriate policies and procedures for when such declarations are made?

**Related WorkSafe publications**
- 12 ways to make small business safer
- Getting started with workplace health and safety: An introduction to workplace
- Guide to incident notification
- First aid in the workplace (Compliance Code)
- Dangerous goods, Storage and handling (Code of Practice)
- Australian Standards
  - AS 1851.1-1995: Maintenance of fire protection equipment - Portable fire extinguishers and fire blankets
  - AS 3745 - 2002: Emergency control organisation and procedures for buildings, structures and workplaces
  - AS 4083 -1997: Planning for emergencies - Health care facilities

**Neighbouring businesses**
- Have you considered neighbouring businesses and how you will let them know about an emergency situation should one arise?
- Have you considered the risks from neighbouring businesses (e.g., fire from restaurant/takeaway food outlets; Q fever from cattle yards; truck accidents on major roads, etc.)?

**Chemical safety**
- Are current material safety data sheets available for all chemicals on site?
- Are all chemicals labelled and stored in a safe manner?
- Is appropriate equipment available to initially respond to a chemical incident, such as absorbent material to contain a liquid spill?
- Is appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) and training provided to protect workers who are called on to deal with a chemical release?

**Post incident follow-up**
- Are there procedures to notify WorkSafe about an incident where necessary?
- Are there procedures to ensure the cause of the emergency is determined and action is taken to prevent a similar incident occurring again?
- Are there procedures to ensure the welfare of employees after an emergency or an incident, such as medical treatment or trauma counselling?

**Review**
- Are emergency practice runs (e.g., evacuation drills) undertaken to assess the effectiveness of the EMP?
- Is someone responsible for documenting and retaining results of EMP practice runs?
- Is someone responsible for reviewing the EMP and informing staff of any revisions?

**First aid**
- Have you conducted a first aid assessment?
- Does your workplace have trained first aiders and suitable first aid facilities (e.g., fully stocked first aid kit)?

**Australian Standards**
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Go to standards.com.au or call 1300 654 646 for copies.
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Emergency services
Further information to assist you put together an EMP is available from:

- Metropolitan Fire Brigade, Community Education Department – 03 9665 4464, mfb.vic.gov.au
- Country Fire Authority, Community Infrastructure Section – 03 9262 8403, cfa.vic.gov.au
- State Emergency Services, Emergency Management Consultancy Section – 03 9684 6666, ses.vic.gov.au

Further information
WorkSafe Victoria has additional guidance that focuses on asbestos. For further information contact the WorkSafe Victoria Advisory Service on 1800 136 089 or go to worksafe.vic.gov.au

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