ARE WE READY?



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There is nothing better than being prepared for emergency situations. Imagine a scenario like a fire at your workplace that you are unable to extinguish because of poor planning and housekeeping. Imagine being unable to exit such a situation. These types of situations oftentimes require time-critical execution of preplanned responses and access to crucial resources. It is likely that you have heard the phrase emergency action plan, but do you know what it is? Could you effectively apply it in the event



Fire trucks spray water on Hangar 1 at Naval Air Station Brunswick, Maine, as it burns. The hangar, built in 1942, had been deserted for two years and was in the process of being demolished. Crews from as far away as Freeport and Woolwich came to assist. (U.S. Navy photo by Chief Petty Officer Roger Duncan)

of an emergency? Knowledge of what to do in a crisis and continuous enforcement of safety standards has proven to save lives and valuable equipment. A great example of this is the 2003 Chicago nightclub incident where mass panic ensued after mace was sprayed in the nightclub. The unfortunate death of 21 clubgoers was attributed to the immediately evident locked and blocked exits. Something so simple could have saved those lives.

How does such an important and critical concept get neglected? In our military occupations, there are days that demand times of expedited working parties and working until we are dead tired. There are other days we may be looking to lend a hand just to break up the monotony of the day. It is those times of hurriedness, distraction due to focus on work tasks and fatigue that access to exits and emergency items may be neglected. This often happens when we return from deployment. After months of being at sea, all we need to do is offload our gear into the hangar before spending time with our loved ones. Pallet after pallet is forklifted to open space in the hangar. Suddenly a fire bottle is blocked, then the manual fire suppression start switch, then a fire suppression system turret, then an emergency exit ... Is it OK because there are more fire bottles, the sprinkler system is supposed to be automated, there are multiple turrets to flood the hangar with suppression agent and more exits? To add more fuel to the fire, many of these automated sprinklers and aqueous film-forming foam systems are inoperable and beyond repair. We must make sure that our primary and secondary safeguards are accessible and operable. I stress upon you that seconds matter in these emergency scenarios and these items are strategically placed.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has clear standards that, if met, ensure that we are decreasing our exposure to risks. To minimize danger to employees, exit routes must be kept free of explosive, highly flammable furnishings or any obstructions that would impede the quickest evacuation of the space. This means that equipment or materials may not permanently, or even temporarily, obstruct the route. Exits and routes must be easily identified through the utilization of signs and lights that are always visible. The same rules apply if the workplace is receiving alterations, repairs or under construction.

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Safeguards such as fire alarms, fire sprinklers, fire doors, exit lighting and eyewash stations must always be in proper working order. Portable fire extinguishers are an effective early response to combat a developing fire if they are properly installed, maintained and readily available for use. Fire extinguisher location recommendations vary with the type of workplace and the associated risks. To avoid putting workers in danger, fire extinguishers should be located throughout the workplace and readily accessible in the event of a fire. Consistent verification of this helps to ensure that the emergency exits and emergency response equipment is not blocked and operates as it should. The required inspections of these items is more than a check in the box. The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) provides specific recommendations for fire extinguishers based off the type of workplace and the risks associated. The NFPA recommendations can be found on OSHA's website.

Sailors and Marines work in various environments that each pose different risks. It is imperative that we train to these environments and the various emergency action plans to ensure that we are ready if and when the time comes to combat these hazards. Instinctive readiness will ensure that we are taking the vital actions needed to minimize injuries and damage. We cannot forego the basic safety standards; lives depend on it!

OSHA Evacuation Plans and Procedures eTool: https://www.osha.gov/etools/evacuation-plans-procedures/emergency-standards/portable-extinguishers/placement

Cover: A firefighter hoses down smoldering embers following a fire in Hangar 183 on Naval Air Facility Atsugi, Japan. (U.S. Navy photo by Timothy P McGough)