Is Your Workplace Prepared?

Cintas Corp.

According to a 2012 study of more than 1,300 U.S. workers, 75 percent of employees believe their company is not well-prepared for a natural disaster. Cintas Corp., a leader in first-aid and safety products, recently announced seven mistakes businesses make during emergency planning in recognition of National Preparedness Month. The theme of this year's event is "Pledge to Prepare," and encourages businesses to prepare for emergencies in order to reduce their impact.

"Disaster can strike at any moment, leaving employees afraid and confused amidst chaos," said John Amann, Vice President of First Aid & Safety, Cintas. "However, if safety directors prepare workers beforehand, they can ensure they're ready for a potential emergency. Understanding common mistakes businesses make in preparing for emergencies is an important step in emergency planning and training."

The worst emergency planning mistakes made by businesses include:

1. Forgetting to write and update emergency action plans: Every business should have emergency action plans that detail evacuation procedures in case of fire or flood and also where employees can take shelter in the event of an earthquake or tornado. These plans should be posted in a public area and reviewed in detail in safety training sessions. Safety directors should also update emergency plans periodically to incorporate new risks or improve procedures.
2. Conducting fire drills infrequently: Fire drills should be conducted twice each year and cover primary and alternative exit routes. Sometimes, employees are slow to react, assuming it is simply a drill, or attempt to recover personal belongings before fleeing a building. Therefore, safety directors must emphasize that everyone should evacuate immediately whenever alarms sound. Designate an evacuation meeting point so that everyone understands where to go once outside and use an employee roster to take attendance once at the meeting spot.
3. Ignoring the risk of illness: Major outbreaks, such as the H1N1 virus, can lead to prolonged absences from work and can have a significant impact on a business' bottom line. However, companies can limit the spread of an epidemic by encouraging sick employees to stay at home while infected and alert supervisors to their condition. This allows them to notify coworkers of an outbreak and remind everyone of prevention methods. Employees should be taught to wash hands with warm water and soap and use disinfectant to avoid transmitting germs.
4. Providing inadequate tornado and earthquake shelter: Businesses in high-risk areas should designate shelters for extreme weather events and conduct annual drills. If employees are unaware of where to take shelter,

chaos can ensue in times of emergency.

5. Assuming workers know how call for help in the event of an emergency: Employers should ensure that every employee at the facility knows when and how to reach their emergency service providers (i.e., 9-911). Encourage employees to call 911 from a landline as opposed to a cellular device and post signs that indicate how to dial out using the landline. Employees should also know what to do in case emergency help is called, such as who will meet the responding emergency personnel. Since help is often more than 8-10 minutes away, employees should be trained to perform CPR and use an automated external defibrillator and fire extinguisher. This could be the difference between losing a worker and saving a life.
6. Failing to thoroughly educate about toxic materials: Chemicals can cause burns, explosions and serious injuries if workers don't take proper precautions. In 2011, more than 150 workers at anArkansasprocessing plant were hospitalized after human error led to the accidental mixing of two chemicals. Before allowing employees to work with chemicals, require them to complete training. Remind them to wear gloves, masks and uniforms that cover skin completely, read all warnings, directions and hazard pictorials and make sure to ventilate the work area.
7. Becoming complacent about safety: Assuming an emergency will not happen is a dangerous mentality. Businesses should never assume a fire, chemical spill, explosion, flood or epidemic will not occur. Take a proactive approach and ensure all employees are trained on how to handle all types of disasters. Conduct training that details a variety of emergency responses, from a cardiac arrest incident or fire, to a natural disaster such as a tornado or earthquake. Taking a proactive approach will help employees react without panic if a large-scale emergency were to occur.

"Teaching employees about potential emergencies and proper response is an important part of every disaster plan," said Jamie Samide, Senior Director of Marketing, Cintas. "Taking a proactive approach by having training and safety equipment in place and also having reactive solutions, like AED's, in place will help businesses respond to any type of emergency."

What's your take? Please feel free to comment below! For more information, please visit www.cintas.com/firstaidsafety *[1].*

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