

# **RISK MANAGEMENT GUIDE TO** *EMERGENCY RESPONSE PLANNING*



## **EMERGENCY RESPONSE PLANNING**

### **THE SIX-STEP PROCESS TO DEVELOPING AN EFFECTIVE EMERGENCY RESPONSE PLAN**

A well-thought-out Emergency Response Plan provides employees at all levels with effective and tested procedures to respond to a variety of emergency situations. Emergency Response Plans should not be developed and used as a recipe (i.e. a set of specific instructions with precise measurements used for a consistent outcome) for responding to emergencies. Rather, effective plans offer guidance by identifying the fundamental processes that should be followed during emergency situations. Lastly, Emergency Response Plans are not a substitute for thinking. Proper execution of the plan requires analyzing the situation and formulating the best response based on the situation and the available resources.

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## ESSENTIAL BUILDING BLOCKS FOR THE SUCCESSFUL PLAN

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When developing an Emergency Response Plan, an important concept to understand is that it is a continual process; the plan is never complete, and the planning cycle never ends. “Completed” plans (the one’s gathering dust on a bookshelf prepared merely to fulfill a regulatory or insurance requirement) will be useless in an emergency. The most effective plans are those that have been continually scrutinized, modified and updated by thoughtful and proactive emergency planners. Effective plans will always be:

- Up-to-date
- Easily accessible
- Easy to follow
- Address the issues identified in the Risk Assessment process
- Outline specific duties and responsibilities for the Crisis Response Team members, Emergency Response Team members and employees
- Tested and refined

So how do you develop an effective Emergency Response Plan? The following outlines the Six-Step process designed to assist an organization build and execute a quality Emergency Response Plan:

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### STEP #1: ASSEMBLE TEAMS

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The cornerstone for any plan is assembling a group of competent and qualified individuals that will take ownership and accountability for their duties and responsibilities. In short, you need the right people in the right roles. Effective plans will include two distinct teams: a Crisis Management Team (CMT) and an Emergency Response Team (ERT). In smaller organizations, individuals will often have roles and responsibilities on both teams. A description of these two teams begins with the clear definition of both a crisis and an emergency to distinguish the two events, followed by the identification of the different roles associated with each team.

#### **Crisis vs. Emergency**

The terms “crisis” and “emergency” are not synonymous. A crisis is an event that puts the organization’s future at risk. An emergency is a serious event that typically has a limited impact on the organization. However, it is important to understand that a poorly handled emergency can escalate into a crisis event. The following outlines the characteristics of both an emergency and a crisis:



### Emergency

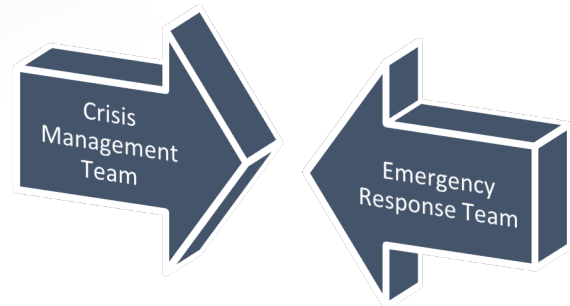
- Serious incident requiring prompt action
- Small scale, not likely to escalate
- Onsite resources can usually manage the situation
- Minimal business disruption
- Little, if any, media attention
- Limited impact to the organization

### Crisis

- Jeopardizes the organization's reputation
- Interferes with normal operation
- May require significant assistance from local and/or regional emergency responders
- Falls under close media or potential government scrutiny
- Potential long-term, negative impact on the organization

### Crisis Management Team (CMT)

Simply put, the CMT is responsible for making strategic decisions during crisis situations. The CMT is generally made up of department heads, executive team, communications/ marketing staff and Human Resources. In smaller organizations, the CMT could be comprised of the business owner, a manager, and an accountant. The CMT is typically deployed at the onset of a crisis, or put on stand-by via the ERT if a situation has the potential to become a crisis. The main objective of the CMT is to protect the brand and ensure that the long-term viability of the organization remains intact. With that in mind, a critical component of crisis management is managing the media and getting the organization's intended message out to stakeholders, employees and the public.



### Emergency Response Team (ERT)

The ERT is considered the "boots on the ground" force responsible for immediately responding to and managing the incident. For example, if a fire occurred at a venue, the ERT would be responsible for handling the situation. The individual that heads up the ERT (often referred to as the "Incident Commander") would lead and direct the ERT to take actions such as initiating building evacuation procedures, calling 911, and coordinating with outside emergency responders. Again, in smaller organizations, the ERT members might also need to transition into their CMT duties should the incident escalate to a crisis level.



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## STEP #2: CONDUCT RISK ASSESSMENT

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The second step when developing an Emergency Response Plan is to conduct a Risk Assessment. This process will identify high-priority hazards and potential emergency scenarios. A Risk Assessment will answer the following questions:

- What hazards exist within or surrounding the venue?
- How frequently can they occur?
- Which hazards pose the greatest overall threat to the organization?
- How severely can hazards/emergency scenarios impact the organization's staff, patrons, infrastructure, finances and reputation?

From there, a full ranking of each hazard (measured by both likelihood and consequence) can be rendered allowing organizations to better prepare their Emergency Response Plans.

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## STEP #3: DEVELOP THE PLAN

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Once the required teams have been assembled and hazards have been identified that pose the greatest overall threat to the organization, the Emergency Response Plan can now be put to pen and paper. The best plans are concise, easy to read and clearly define the roles and responsibilities of the response teams and frontline employees.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) 1910.38 states that employers with ten or more employees must have an Emergency Action Plan in writing, and said plan must be made available in the workplace for employees to review.

In all likelihood, the written plans for use by management personnel and response teams will differ from the plans provided to frontline employees. Management personnel/response teams' plans may provide comprehensive detail and include the big picture perspective. Frontline employees may only be required to have a basic understanding of their roles and responsibilities as it relates to their specific work area. Many times, a condensed bullet-point summary will suffice for the frontline team.



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## STEP #4: CONDUCT TRAINING

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Once the overall plan has been developed, all personnel within the organization must be trained. While the CMT and ERT will need to undergo specialized training, every employee should be trained in the following:

- The plan's chain of command
- How to activate the facility's emergency response system
- Individual roles and responsibilities for the various emergency scenarios including, but not limited to, the following:
  - Emergency evacuation
  - Severe weather plans - shelter-in-place
  - Fire
  - Medical emergency
  - Bomb threat
  - Active shooter
- General layout of the facility, including the following locations:
  - Evacuation routes, exits and assembly areas
  - First aid room(s)
  - AED(s)
  - Portable fire extinguishers
  - Manual-pull fire alarms



Additionally, per OSHA, the employer must provide the following points of training to all employees:

- 1) When employee initially hires-on and starts their job;
- 2) When the employee's responsibilities within the plan change;
- 3) When the plan itself has been changed.

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## STEP #5: PRACTICE THE PLAN

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Benjamin Franklin is credited for saying, "tell me and I forget, teach me and I may remember, involve me and I learn." The point Franklin is making is that individuals learn more by doing and practicing than from anything else. In fact, studies have





shown that individuals have only a 10% to 15% retention rate from passive teaching methods such as lecture and reading, as opposed to a 75% retention rate by practicing a skill. If an organization wants to ensure its workforce is prepared, involve them in drills and training exercises. Drills afford employees the opportunity to practice the actions they will take before, during and after an emergency. A key best-practice is to conduct annual table-top training drills with the organization's response teams, and involve all employees in live action training drill scenarios and exercises. Additionally, inviting local First Responders to table-top drills and training exercises is an excellent way to develop a rapport with the various emergency response agencies and to also gain valuable insights from their perspective.

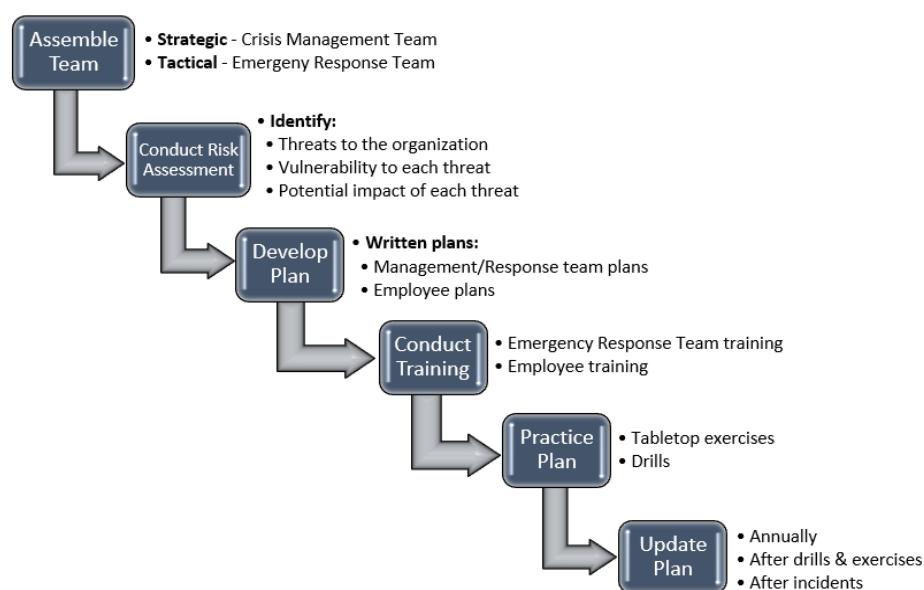
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## STEP #6: UPDATE THE PLAN

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Ultimately, an organization should think of its Emergency Response Plan as a living document. Effective plans are constantly revised and updated to make sure they adapt to the ongoing needs of the organization and its environment. Additionally, through table-top drills and training exercises, plan inefficiencies, holes and weaknesses will likely be exposed, proving that drills and training are valuable exercises. This is the appropriate time to make necessary adjustments and enhancements to strengthen the overall plan.

### The Six-Step Process to Developing an Emergency Response Plan



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## CONCLUSION

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If an organization's goal in developing an Emergency Response Plan is to merely cross an item off a checklist as a completed project, then the plan will be ineffective. Emergency planning is an ongoing process that requires thoughtful and detailed planning, frequent updating, regular training sessions and annual drills.

Following the Six-Step process outlined above will ensure the organization is properly prepared to execute the plan effectively in the event an emergency situation erupts within the business environment.



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