

Best Practices for Emergency Preparedness: 3 rules for a well-rounded contingency plan

Written by Alexis Agredo, 25 JANUARY 2022

Guidelines on how to ensure effective emergency preparedness through an all-encompassing plan.

1. The more, the mightier: Develop your emergency management plan with input from every department.

Logically, the more you can foresee in planning, the more effective your contingency plan will be in practice. As such, emergency preparedness is not a one-person (or one-team) job. For an exhaustive contingency plan, you need to include as many departments as possible.

Traditionally, an organization's emergency management function is charged with creating the framework for reducing vulnerability to hazards and workplace accidents and coping with disasters. If this process doesn't include perspectives from the full spectrum of stakeholders, it results in not only an incomplete understanding of risk but incoherent response measures.

Fill in the gaps and find the blind spots that threaten your organization's emergency preparedness with a team of subject matter experts from every department. This team should include not just the senior staff, but every role involved in daily operations and should create opportunities for them to share straightforward feedback.

2. Fine-tune all 4 phases: Employ emergency preparedness best practices at every stage.

The true timeline of emergency management starts well before – and lasts long after – the actual incident occurs. Best practices for emergency preparedness are just as much about preventing accidents as they are about responding to them. Use these guidelines to be sure your contingency plan covers all four phases of emergency management: mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery.

Mitigation: Trade in theory for true-life application.

The first phase of emergency management, mitigation, focuses on preventing emergencies and reducing loss if an event does occur. During this stage, it's important to remember that there can be more than one potential mitigation strategy for any given risk. Your plan should prioritize what is realistic for your team, offering your emergency manager the flexibility to choose not only the most efficient course of action but also the one with the best chance to be implemented. Be sure to base mitigation strategies on specific risks and allocate resources for addressing them.

Preparedness: Be ready to act, be ready to adapt.

The preparedness phase refers to the development of plans and capabilities for effective disaster or workplace incident response. The emergency manager must use a

Provided by your....

| Collaborators in Risk Management |



multitude of resources to create and maintain a well-organized structure for crisis response, including a risk-based emergency operations plan. For this plan to be effective, it must be flexible and applicable to all community emergency operations, based on the consequences of the event – not just the precipitating action.

Response: React (and revise) when necessary.

Considered the most dramatic phase of emergency management, the response phase involves reaction to a disaster or workplace incident, either in anticipation or once it has begun. The key to this phase is creative problem-solving based on the event – not rigid adherence to pre-existing plans. Emergency managers must be able to adapt quickly to a rapidly changing and frequently unclear situation, suggesting alternative tactics or procedures, as necessary.

Recovery: Restore operations and optimize your plan.

Recovery is the fourth and final phase, aimed at restoring critical functions and managing recovery to functionality. Make sure to maintain a short-term view when developing this plan to help teams get back up and running without too big of an objective blocking their way.

3. Test and train all teams along the way.

Once you have a contingency plan in place, get everyone onboard by testing it in a real-world setting. Make sure that managers can test every procedure and measure to determine their feasibility and to offer feedback on how they can be improved. The training program should involve various instruction for all employees, including:

- Review of the response plans,
- Review of best practices,
- Drills and exercises.

Inclusive perspective meets exhaustive planning: Factor the whole nine yards into your emergency management framework.

Creating a comprehensive emergency management plan is a complex process – but one that is vital in the event of a major incident. Certainly, thorough emergency preparedness must integrate all applicable regulatory obligations. However, completeness requires more than compliance. Expand your plan through the emergency preparedness best practices outlined above to ensure that it includes all the necessary elements – and employees – for ultimate success.