

What is Accessible Emergency Information?

Emergency information is any visual or audio material that explains what workers should do if there is an emergency at the workplace. Examples of emergency information include:

- Posters displayed in prominent locations
- Videos workers watch during training

Workers with disabilities must receive emergency information in formats they can access. For instance, if a worker cannot read the information on a poster, the employer may send the text of the poster in an email that the worker can read with a screen reader or magnifier. Another worker may not be able to hear the instructions in a video but could read captions on the screen or a text transcript of the video.

Employers should provide accessible emergency information to all workers who receive workplace information in accessible formats. In most cases, a worker who needs this accommodation will ask for it. However, some workers may not remember to ask for this accommodation, because emergencies do not happen every day. Employers should open a discussion with any workers who use accessible formats to find out how best to make emergency information accessible to them.

What is an Individualized Workplace Emergency Response Plan?

An individualized workplace emergency response plan is a written document that details all assistance a worker needs during a workplace emergency. A worker might need assistance with various tasks involved in responding to an emergency, including:

Activating an alarm, or finding out that an alarm is sounding or flashing

- Locating or following paths to building exits
- Communicating with emergency responders
- Moving through crowds in stressful situations
- Travelling through and out of buildings without using elevators

- Finding and using designated waiting areas

While there are only a few guidelines that outline what an individualized workplace emergency response plan must include, there are some best practices that all businesses should follow when creating one.

Emergencies at Your Workplace

Before employers are ready to create individualized workplace emergency response plans, they must be aware of what happens during an emergency at their workplaces. They should be aware of everything workers are expected to know and do during an emergency. Employers should also know whether their building has set-ups that will help workers with disabilities know and do these things. They can start by reviewing:

- Evacuation and fire safety plans
- Alarms
- Maps
- Exits
- Designated waiting areas

Employers should then think about how people with different disabilities might find out what they need to know, and get where they need to go, during an emergency. Employers' knowledge about the emergency procedures in their buildings can help them make these procedures as accessible as they can.

Emergency alerts and signage

Buildings should have multiple signals, such as audio, visual, and vibratory alarms. There are many devices on the market that emit both audio and visual cues. Workers must know what cues they can expect to receive if an emergency arises.

Visual signage needs to be legible for anyone to read. Signage should contain images, Braille, large print, and good colour contrast. Another way employers can strengthen their plans is by offering audio directions via public address system (PA system). These directions must be clear enough to lead workers unassisted to a general exit route, where they can seek assistance and safely exit the building.

Exit route

The exit strategy must be safe for everyone to use. If stairs are the only option for exiting the building, the employer should offer backup aids, such as a stair-descent device or evacuation chair, for any worker who does not use stairs. Elevators should not be considered as an option to use in an emergency exit strategy.

Exit paths should be clear of any obstacles on the floor and overhead. All doors should be labeled.

Individualized workplace emergency response plans help workers in cases where the employer cannot implement some of these strategies, or where the worker needs other forms of assistance.

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