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10 Keys to an Effective Emergency Action Plan

by Chris Kilbourne. This article is from Safety Daily Advisor.

Comments in brackets [] added as thoughts for congregations by Rabbi Paul Drazen.

Earthquakes, floods, fires, hurricanes, tornadoes—having an action plan is an important part of emergency preparedness. However, merely writing one isn't enough. You also have to make sure it is workable.

Here are 10 points to consider when developing an emergency action plan, from the [Cal/OSHA Compliance Advisor](#):

1. Since electricity is often not available during an emergency, do not store your action plan in electronic form only; make sure there are hard copies readily available. Also, make sure phone lists associated with your plan are available in hard copy and not stored solely in an electronic document or on phone speed-dial lists.
2. List the location of important utility shutoffs, and include digital photos of them so that they can be located quickly and easily (and when doing your regular safety inspections, make sure access to shutoffs is not blocked). Remember, too, to include the location of any tools or keys needed to access the shutoffs—it does no good knowing where the shutoff is if it can't actually be shut off.
3. In addition to utility shutoffs, list any equipment [computers] or machinery [think of kitchen – stoves, ovens, refrigerators, freezers] that needs to be shut down in an emergency and who has responsibility for doing so.
4. Consider asking Human Resources to update contact lists. They are generally in a better position than other administrative personnel when it comes to having access to employee contact phone numbers—and they also know when employees leave or move to different positions. [Don't forget contact numbers for congregational lay leaders.]
5. Have each department [office, school, early childhood/summer camp] review all pertinent parts of the plan to ensure accuracy and workability. Often, if one person is charged with writing the plan, he or she will write something that looks good on paper but works poorly in real life.
6. Conduct periodic drills to ensure employees know what to do in an emergency. Be sure to critique the drills afterward to fine tune your plan (for example, did employees recognize the evacuation alarm, did they turn off machines or equipment required to be turned off, and did they evacuate in an orderly and timely fashion?). [Don't forget practice for Religious School, Early Childhood, summer day camp and ... services, both daily and Shabbat.]
7. Be sure to include provisions in your plan for visitors [worshippers, simcha guests] to your facility: How do you account for their whereabouts and who is in charge of ensuring they know how to evacuate? [Don't forget services, both daily and Shabbat. Are signs and instructions available in the sanctuary, chapel, social hall, restrooms?]
8. If necessary, include plan provisions regarding who has authority to allow employees back into buildings or restart operations.
9. Since emergencies don't always happen on Tuesdays at 10 a.m., when writing your plan, be sure to take into account variations in emergency procedures that account for differences in shifts or days of the week (for example, fewer or no staff at your facility, fewer supervisors, darkness, etc.). [Do you have a safe place to store Torah scrolls? Other important ritual objects? Is data backed up with off-site back-ups?]
10. List in the plan the locations of special equipment and emergency supplies (food, water, etc. in the event employees are stranded at your facility), and remember to do periodic inventories to ensure they are where you say they are and that equipment is in working order.

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