

Emergency and Fire Preparedness

Emergency Exits and Routes

In the case of a fire emergency, you want to get everyone out of the facility as quickly as possible.

Emergency exits and routes are crucial because they provide a clear path to safety. Here are the qualities of effective emergency exits and routes, as specified by OSHA:

Emergency Exits

- Must be a permanent part of the building
- Must be provided with a protected way of travel out of the building or out of the area
- May contain way of access of passageways, stairs, aisles and stairwells, ramps, or a series exit doors
- May have ways of access that lead from one area or floor to another or from one building to another

Exit Routes

- Must be clear of obstructions
- Must be kept free of explosive or highly flammable furnishings and other decorations
- Must be wide enough to accommodate the number of people trying to get out
- Must be strong enough to support their weight
- Must be properly lighted and marked with EXIT signs

Alarm Systems

Alarm systems are significant because they alert all employees of a fire emergency, which is the first step in getting to safety. An alarm system may come in the form of a smoke detector, a manual pull box or even a vocal system in which employees alert others by yelling "fire" or some other specified word. If your business is using a smoke detector system the batteries should be changed once a year. When it comes to alarm systems, OSHA recommends knowing:

- The locations of the manual pull boxes or other alarm systems
- How to operate the alarm system
- When the alarm system is to be used
- What the alarm sounds like
- What action to take when the alarm is sounded

Prevention

It's great to know what to do in a fire emergency, but it's even better to prevent the fire from happening in the first place. Electrical fires claim the lives of 280 Americans each year and injure 1,000 more. The U.S. Fire Administration (USFA) provides the following precautions to help minimize the risk of a fire:

- Routinely check your electrical appliances and wiring. Replace all worn, old or damaged appliance cords immediately.
- If an appliance has a three-prong plug, use it only in a three-slot outlet. Never force it to fit into a two-slot outlet or extension cord.
- Keep clothes, curtains, and other items that can catch fire at least three feet from all portable electric space heaters.
- Avoid putting cords where they can be damaged or pinched by furniture, under rugs and carpets, or across doorways.

Let's not forget fire extinguishers as a key component for fire safety. Fire extinguishers put out fire by taking away one or more elements of fire.

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