Resource Guide

Subject:	Evidence of an Employee Alarm System
Facility Site Review Source:	Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) All Plan Letter 20-004, Facility Site Reviews.
Relevant Law/Standard:	
Agency//Organization Source:	
Agency/Organization URL	https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/etools/evacuation/alarms.html

Purpose:

OSHA's employee alarm systems standard applies to all employers that use an alarm system to satisfy any OSHA standard that requires employers to provide an early warning for emergency action, or reaction time for employees to safely escape the work place, the immediate work area, or both. [29 CFR 1910.165]

Definition:

The employee alarm shall be capable of being perceived above ambient noise or light levels by all employees in the affected portions of the workplace. Tactile devices may be used to alert those employees who would not otherwise be able to recognize the audible or visual alarm. [29 CFR 1910.165(b)(2)] The two most common types of alarms are audible and visual devices.

Policy Statement:

Employers must install and maintain an operable employee alarm system that has a distinctive signal to warn employees of fire or other emergencies, unless employees can promptly see or smell a fire or other hazard in time to provide adequate warning to them. [29 CFR 1910. 37] OSHA: For those employers with 10 or fewer employees in a particular workplace, direct voice communication is an acceptable procedure for sounding the alarm provided all employees can hear the alarm. Such workplaces do not need a back-up system.

Alert and Alarm Systems

If you own or manage your own building, it is up to you to install emergency alert systems. Many commercial alarm companies provide all-in-one solutions that include security alarms, fire alarms and even carbon monoxide detectors.

Weather alert radios pick up signals from National Weather Service radio stations to alert the public of both weather and non-weather related watches and emergencies. Like smoke detectors, these radios can be programmed to sound an alarm so that you and your staff know if there is a danger or threat of danger in your area.

Designate Assembly Areas

Designate an assembly area where everybody in the office will rendezvous for a headcount and further instructions. Ideally, your assembly area should be easily accessible but also safe. For example, you might opt to meet at a restaurant or grocery store across the street from your building.

Tip

Many people over-rely on technology such as cell phones and computers to provide information during a disaster. Unfortunately, cell towers and the power grid may be damaged or disrupted during emergencies. Battery powered and hand crank radios can provide you and your staff with accurate, up-to-date information even when you can't get cell reception and the electricity doesn't work.

Educate Your Employees

Information about emergency processes should be included in your onboarding process. In addition, take time during all-hands meetings to go over safety information with your team.

Employees who have responsibilities in disaster situations should be provided with education and training. This may include training with first responders, Community Emergency Response Teams, or the Red Cross.

Don't assume that one class or notification is enough training for your staff. Provide refresher courses and training throughout the year.

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