

SAFETY TOOL KIT

PREPARING FOR A CRITICAL EVENT



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As a safety professional, you will need to feel comfortable with feeling uncomfortable. Preparedness for a critical event can be one of these feelings.

Planning, discussing, and following through when a critical event takes place can be one of the most uncomfortable times of a safety professional's career. It

can be something you will need to personally understand how to deal with. Having preparation, open discussion, and training can lessen your discomfort.

When a critical event happens, you will need to realize the gravity of the situation. You receive a call that an employee on a site is involved in a fatality. EMS is on the way. What plans do you have in place?

Emergency contacts. You should have an emergency flow chart that is communicated throughout the company. This should identify who is the first notification, second, and so on – safety, CEO, human resources, family, customer, and other company management. Determine what level of information will be passed along.



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The media. Identify who will address the media and detail what should be said. I suggest that all site personnel direct media to one area, and not near where employees exit. Let the media know that top management will be making a statement at that specific location – they will not want to miss that.

The family. At the same time media is being directed, determine who will speak to the family and detail what will be said. This is very difficult. How this process takes place may be very fluid depending on the critical event. In many cases, the family will know before you do. If your plan includes company representation at all clinic/hospital visits, then you should already have someone at the hospital to "be there" for the family.

Your Insurer. Do you have an open relationship with your insurer? This is important. They will need to be called. Most have an emergency number/contact to take the call and assist you.

Regulatory. OSHA requires that a fatality be called in within eight hours of the employer being notified about the event. Plan for who will handle this and exactly when this call should take place. This can be very touchy. If the critical event could be attributed to a preexisting condition – like a known heart condition – and you call it in, having the fatality later removed from a company's safety record is difficult. It may be better to accept the violation and fight that rather than trying to get the fatality removed from the regulatory website. Discuss this with your top management and customer within the first six hours to together decide the direction.

Site closure. Should this happen? Who will be responsible to close the site? Having a close relationship with your customer is the best way to make a quick and smart decision on this. If you are the only one responsible, possible closure should be discussed with top management within the first six hours, or sooner.

Counseling. Do not forget the other employees onsite. Having a professional service available to speak with employees is critical. If you can, have an all-employee meeting to communicate that

support professionals will be available for them, both individually and privately. If the site is closed, this should be done as soon as employees return.

Emotional first aid is not something we are taught – we know how to put on a band-aid, but feelings of loss and sadness can be devastating to an employee's emotional well-being if not handled properly.

I hope that no one will ever be placed in this situation. Life can never be brought back ... but being prepared will help everyone handle a critical event in the best way possible. Life is short, finite, and it plays for keeps. Please, be prepared!



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