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EMERGENCY PLANNING FOR CONSTRUCTION SITES

As creatures of habit, people sometimes do things "routinely" without thinking about them. Remember your routine this morning? Did you go through the motions without much thought?

At work, do you take the same path "automatically?" This is not necessarily wrong, because your routines often save time and energy. But when it comes to emergency situations involving escape and evacuation, people tend to use the most familiar route too.

Sometimes that route may not be the best way to escape.

To ensure your safety and wellbeing, it is important to prepare carefully for emergencies. In the ever-changing construction environment, this is particularly important.

Construction sites are continuously faced with changes in the physical layout, changes in emergency devices available and in harmful exposures. Careful pre-planning of emergency procedures, prior to the start of a project and during changes in different construction phases, must be done and all crew members must be aware of these procedures.

The following steps are important components of an emergency action plan:

Get to know your entire layout--site, building or structure as best you can. Review a site/floor plan that identifies emergency exits, emergency equipment (i.e., fire extinguishers, hoses, standpipes, pull stations, etc.).

This plan should be posted in conspicuous areas and show evacuation routes as well as meeting points.

Analyze potential emergency situations at your work site. Will the hazards change regularly, gradually or stay the same over a period of time?

Know where emergency phone numbers are posted at your work location. These include medical emergency personnel, police, fire, EPA, Coast Guard, health department, OSHA, utilities, insurance carriers, etc.

Numbers should be conspicuously posted.

Know who has responsibility during emergencies. Who is assigned to contact emergency personnel, first aid responders, fire brigades and a cleanup team? Who is assigned to talk to the media if they show up? Responses will be more efficient if everyone knows whose job it is to serve as incident commander, or to take specific steps.

When emergency devices such as personnel protective equipment, fire extinguishers, etc. must be used, do all co-workers know how to use this equipment correctly?

Practice the emergency procedures to ensure their effectiveness.

Remember that emergency procedures must be updated whenever there is a change in the operation, hazardous exposures, physical layout or if new employees are working in the location. Weekly safety meetings are a good time for review.

The last thing you want to think about during an emergency is how to evacuate or escape--especially if your most familiar route is not accessible.

Knowing the emergency plan and being aware of surrounding conditions can mean the difference between quick action and the wrong action.

Your safety and the survival of all crew members depends on taking the right action.