

# Be engaged in emergency safety drills



## For most of us, safety drills are not uncommon.

They have been a part of our lives ever since our grade school days, but does that mean we are experts now? Unfortunately, not. There are so many variables involved, like the type of emergency, the layout of buildings etc. that no one can be an expert on them all. However, one of our best defenses against a disaster is being as prepared as possible.

Unfortunately, too often people view workplace drills as an inconvenient interruption or as a social break – chatting with others throughout alarms and instructions. I bet we've all seen those who've gone back to their desks to quickly grab something, or those checking their cell phones or drinking coffee. Would you really be doing any of those things if your life was truly on the line? Then why don't we take drills as seriously as the real thing?

If you've never faced an emergency situation, be grateful, but don't take it for granted. Complacency can be a killer. In the event of a real emergency, the more thoughtful practice you have, the less likely that you'll be completely panic-stricken and instead you'll be more likely to go into action. While every type of drill will have its own specific requirements, here are some helpful tips to be the best active participant in emergency efforts:

- Know what types of emergencies are likely in your area and what your company conducts drills for – fires; natural disasters like tornadoes, hurricanes, earthquakes, etc.; active shooter incidents; nearby chemical or gas releases.

- Know your company's emergency plans for each type of drill, often located in a safety manual or you can always ask your supervisor. It's especially important for supervisors to go over and reinforce this safety information with new hires.
- Know how to report emergencies – in some companies it may be 911 and in others it may be an in-house number.
- Know where physical fire alarms are located in your facility as well as fire extinguishers. Even if you are not trained to use them, assisting others to locate them can save time in an emergency.
- Understand what the alarms sound like for different types of emergencies.
- Withdrawal from important relationships, activities or responsibilities, such as work, school or financial obligations
- Know where all of the escape routes are located in your facility. The one closest to your workstation may be blocked or you may be in a different part of the building at the time an alarm sounds.
- Always keep evacuation routes clear year round.
- Don't go back to your workstation for personal items during a drill – time is of the essence.
- Don't default to using the main exit during a drill instead of your closest emergency exit.



- Evacuate the facility or get to a designated area as quickly as possible during a drill. Remain quiet and calm to await further instructions.
- Do not use an elevator during an emergency drill.
- If you have any physical issues that hinder your ability to evacuate or get to a designated safe area quickly, alert your supervisor and safety team so they can create a plan to assist you.
- Provide feedback after a drill – share both strengths as well as weaknesses and look for improvements.

People are more used to drills than actual emergencies, but it is dangerous to equate alarms with a “it’s just a drill” attitude. While workers should act as if every drill is the real thing, some companies choose to announce drills ahead of time, so that people are more inclined to take an unannounced drill more seriously.

Finally, remember that caution should still be taken once the emergency is over. Many injuries occur after the fact while amongst all of the debris and aftermath. Being trained in First Aid and CPR, would surely come in handy in emergency situations. Knowing what to do in an emergency, and never having to use the training, is better than having an emergency take place and not knowing what to do.

