Train Everyone, Including the Band, Part 1

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The alarms are relentless, the lights are flashing, and you're offsite. Will your people respond appropriately to the threat or place themselves in harm's way?

Yes, smart emergency response plans are critical. Yet if you don't get the words off the paper and into people's heads, you have failed. Training is essential.

Your mandatory emergency action plan (EAP) and fire prevention plan (FPP) contain procedures that outline precise decision-making and actions. Without proper training, personnel empowered to execute your plans will squander time, duplicate some actions and completely omit others. Your people become needlessly vulnerable, and your organization risks greater loss. In the aftermath, productivity will plummet, and your senior management could face lawsuits, fines and even prosecution.

Also, every applicable national standard mandates employee training on EAPs, disaster recovery and business continuity plans, including NFPA 1600, ASIS.BSI BCM.01 and BS 25999.

What Training Means

OSHA regulations [1] create two classes of employees for emergency response:

employees organized into an emergency team, and all other personnel who are to be supervised during emergencies. Many employers are surprised that OSHA requires every employer to assign employees into an emergency team. “I can’t even train them to stop piggybacking at exterior doors,” they may say. “Now you want them to be emergency responders!”

Consider this: Police and fire officers are not the first responders; they are the official responders. You and your employees are the first responders. Since you can’t repeal the laws of physics, you shall create an emergency team.

Span of Control

NFPA and the federal government recommend a 1:5 ratio for emergency team members to total occupants. “Occupants” includes employees, contractors (cafeteria, security officers, information technology, mail room, cleaning crew, etc.), visitors — any occupants.

This can feel like an onerous mandate proclaimed by some bureaucrat, but it isn’t. The 1:5 ratio was recorded 2,500 years ago when Alexander the Great deployed tens of thousands of soldiers, with horses and equipment, thousands of miles across the then-known world in an organized fashion. Alexander's men were undefeated over this 10-year campaign.

In the business world, experts — starting with Ian Hamilton in the early 20th Century — have recognized the range of 1:3 to 1:7 as the correct ratio of supervisors to those supervised, or “span of control.” NFPA 1600, NIMS, ICS and NRDF are explicit about the range of 1:3 to 1:7, concluding that 1:5 is best.

Span of control is dictated by many factors in your organization:

1. How often senior managers are out of the office.
2. How many mobile employees there are, both intra- and inter-facility.
3. How many hours per week your facility is occupied.
4. Number of shifts worked.
5. How often your emergency response team is trained and exercised.
6. How often your employees are supervised, trained and exercised.
7. Whether your organization’s culture makes emergency planning and response a priority.

Most organizations’ emergency teams are too small. If one or two key members are out when an emergency strikes, your organization’s response is compromised.

Train Everyone, Including the Band

In 1991, the Oceanos cruise ship, carrying 571 passengers and crew, sank in the Indian Ocean off South Africa. To this day, no one knows why.

What we do know is that the first people to abandon ship in lifeboats were the

captain, his senior officers and most of the crew. At his trial for negligence, the captain said, “When I give the order to abandon ship, it doesn't matter what time I leave. ‘Abandon’ is for everybody. If some people want to stay, they can stay."
It took seven hours for everyone else — including some with special needs — to get off the ship. The remaining lifeboats and 16 helicopters ferried all remaining passengers and crew to safety, without major injury.

So who was in command? The tour director? Her emergency team? The band that had been playing for passengers.

When an emergency strikes your facility, it’s probable that many emergency team members will be absent. That’s why you train more people than you think you need to, so you ensure competent response.

Hands-On, Site-Specific Training

OSHA says on-screen training can supplement, but never substitute for, classroom training. OSHA’s battle cry for years has been “hands-on” training in a classroom by a “qualified” trainer because EAP and FPP training requires articulated skills for employees — especially for emergency team members.

All planning and training must be “site specific.” This rules out the exclusive use of stand-alone, off-the-shelf, third-party or headquarters’ programs and videos that your facility might post on its intranet or play in a conference room. These tools may supplement, but cannot substitute for, the annual classroom training tooled to your unique site by a qualified trainer.

“Qualified” is defined by OSHA as one competent from experience and/or training in emergency action and fire prevention. That eliminates human resources personnel who orient new hires on policy and benefits.

What to Train

OSHA's FPP regulation [2] effectively contains a table of contents for this planning. The EAP regulation [3] does not supply a table of contents. This brings us to all-hazards training.

Mandated by all those aforementioned national standards, especially NFPA 1600, the all-hazards protocol requires your organization to plan and train for everything. In addition, your planning and training must enumerate these policies and procedures:

1. Visitor management.
2. Emergency notification systems.
3. Medical standard of care.
4. First aid plan.
5. Bloodborne pathogens plan.
6. Chain of command.

7. Emergency team jobs.
8. Span of control.
9. Command.
10. Control.
11. Communications.
12. Assembly areas.
13. Garage/parking lots.
14. Crisis communications.
15. When to invoke disaster recovery and business continuity plans.

Please tune into the Chemical Equipment Daily for part two of this two-part series. What's your take? Please feel free to comment below! Bo Mitchell was police commissioner of Wilton, CT for 16 years, but retired to found 911 Consulting to create emergency and business continuity plans, training and exercises for organizations. Mitchell has earned 16 certifications in organizational safety and security, while also serving as an expert in landmark court cases nationally. He is also a certified business continuity professional, certified emergency manager and certified in homeland security. For more information, please visit www.911consulting.net *[4].*

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