

Office Emergency Action Plans

What Every Employee and Employer Should Know

What is an Emergency Action Plan?

Emergency Action Plans, or EAPs, are the plans every office must have in place to deal with emergency situations. All employing offices in Congress, including every district office, are required by the Congressional Accountability Act of 1995 to have an EAP. EAPs must be updated regularly, and every employee must be familiar with their contents.

Why is an EAP so important? Quite simply, because EAPs help save lives. Two offices with a significant presence in the World Trade Center complex, Morgan Stanley and the U.S. Customs Service, credit their EAPs with ensuring the safety of their employees during the attacks of September 11, 2001. All but a very small handful of Morgan Stanley and Customs Service employees escaped unharmed that day.

EAPs vary in complexity according to the size and needs of the individual office, but all share at a minimum a few common elements:

- Escape procedures and escape route assignments for staff
- Procedures for staff who must perform critical operations before evacuation (if applicable)
- Assembly areas for staff once outside of the building
- Procedures to account for all staff after an evacuation
- Means for reporting emergencies
- Assignment of rescue and medical duties
- Persons to contact for more information

An EAP should also designate which employee(s) is responsible for coordinating emergency response activities and planning.

What Should Every Employee Know About EAPs?

As an individual, the first thing you should do to prepare for an emergency is to maintain a basic knowledge of your office's emergency action plan. Read your office's EAP and find out who your office emergency coordinator is. If your office does not have one, consider volunteering. Next, be sure you understand how and when you might have to leave your office and how you will know if that is necessary. Do you know if you will be notified by sirens, bells, or by some other means? Most importantly, be sure you know how to exit the building, which exits and stairwells are closest to your office, and where alternate exits are located if the main exits are blocked or impassible. Last, be sure to know where your office will gather once the building is evacuated.

Keep in mind that not all emergencies will call for an evacuation. There may be certain instances in which it is preferable to stay within the confines of the office or some other safe area and shelter in place rather than go outside. Be sure you are familiar with your office's plans for such a contingency, and consider what items – such as food, water, and medications – you may want to keep on hand to be prepared.



What Should Every Employer Know About EAPs?

First and foremost, all Congressional offices are required by law to have a written emergency action plan. *District offices are included in this requirement.* The need for an EAP in district offices cannot be overemphasized. Since so many offices are not in major building complexes that already have emergency evacuation procedures in place, the plan you create might be your only resource for dealing with emergencies.

All staff should be familiar with your office's EAP and trained on proper evacuation and emergency procedures. It might be useful to have an "all hands meeting" with staff to discuss the details of the EAP

and basic office policies on emergencies. Each office should also designate an office emergency coordinator (or coordinators) who can keep the EAP up to date, educate staff about emergency procedures, and help other staff during an evacuation.

Be thorough and comprehensive when planning the office EAP and other emergency policies. You may want to maintain contact lists of employees in case staff become separated or there is a prolonged evacuation and staff need to be contacted. Backups of critical information (like computer files) should also be maintained and kept off-site in case an evacuation results in a prolonged absence from your office. In case your office is required to shelter in place rather than evacuate the building, it is useful to keep a basic supply of food and water on hand for all staff.

Where Can I Find Resources on Emergency Planning and Creating an EAP?

District offices are encouraged to contact local police and emergency preparedness authorities for information about emergency procedures in your area. If your office is in a Federal or state building, you can also contact the General Services Administration (GSA) or the state agency responsible for your facility. The Capitol Police can serve as a resource for more general advice and assistance.

If you want more information on how to write an EAP, contact the Office of Compliance, or go to our web site at www.compliance.gov. Our web site has resources and detailed instructions on how to write an EAP, including a new form-fillable template that allows you to quickly customize a plan for your office. The instructions and the template are all in the

Need to Create an EAP for Your Office?



Go to Our Web Site to Access Our New Form-Fillable EAP Template

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Office of Compliance

Room LA 200, John Adams Building

t/ 202-724-9250

tdd/ 202-426-1912

f/ 202-426-1913

Recorded Information Line/ 202-724-9260

www.compliance.gov

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