Government of
Western
Australia

GUIDANCE NOTE
PREPARING FOR EMERGENCY EVACUATIONS AT THE WORKPLACE

commission
for occupational
safety and health

Foreword

The introduction of the *Occupational Safety and Health Act 1984* enabled the establishment of the tripartite Commission for Occupational Safety and Health. The Commission, which comprises experts and representatives of employers, unions and government, has the function of developing the legislation and any supporting guidance material and making recommendations to the Minister for implementation. To fulfil its functions, the Commission is empowered to establish advisory committees, hold public inquiries and publish and disseminate information.

This guidance note has been developed through the tripartite consultative process and the views of the employers and unions along with those of government and experts have been considered.

The Commission's objective is to promote comprehensive and practical preventive strategies that improve the working environment of Western Australians.

The Act

The *Occupational Safety and Health Act 1984* (the Act) provides for the promotion, co-ordination, administration and enforcement of occupational safety and health in Western Australia.

The Act places certain duties on employers, employees, self-employed people, manufacturers, designers, importers and suppliers.

It also places emphasis on the prevention of accidents and injury.

In addition to the broad duties established by the Act, the legislation is supported by a further tier of statute, commonly referred to as regulations, together with a lower tier of non-statutory codes of practice.

Regulations

Regulations have the effect of spelling out the specific requirements of the legislation

Regulations may prescribe minimum standards and have a general application or they may define specific requirements related to a particular hazard or type of work. They may also allow the licensing or granting of approvals and certificates etc.

Codes of practice

A code of practice is defined in the Act as a document prepared for the purpose of providing:

- practical advice on preventive strategies; and
- a practical means of achieving any code, standard, rule, provision or specification relating to occupational safety and health in Western Australia.

A code of practice may contain explanatory information.

The preventive strategies outlined in a code of practice do not represent the only acceptable means of achieving the standard to which the code refers. A code of practice does not have the same legal force as a regulation and is not sufficient reason, of itself, for prosecution under the Act.

Guidance notes

The next tier in this process comes in the form of guidance notes prepared by the Commission for Occupational Safety and Health.

A guidance note is an explanatory document providing detailed information on the requirements of legislation, regulations, standards, codes of practice or matters relating to occupational safety and health as approved by the Commission.

PREPARING FOR EMERGENCY EVACUATIONS AT THE WORKPLACE

Authority

This guidance note is issued by the Commission for Occupational Safety and Health under the *Occupational Safety and Health Act 1984.*

Scope

This guidance note applies to all workplaces in Western Australia covered by the *Occupational Safety and Health Act 1984.*

It provides guidance on preparing for emergency evacuations at the workplace and some of the legislative requirements in the Occupational Safety and Health Regulations 1996. However, it is not possible to deal with every situation that may be found at workplaces, where there is the potential for an emergency and where emergency evacuations may be required.

The practical guidance in this guidance note should be considered in conjunction with the general duties in the *Occupational Safety and Health Act 1984.*

Application

To be read in conjunction with the *Occupational Safety and Health Act 1984* and the Occupational Safety and Health Regulations 1996.

Contents

1. Introduction

Under the *Occupational Safety and Health Act 1984* and the Occupational Safety and Health Regulations 1996*, the responsible person at the workplace has:

- specific obligations for emergency evacuations – these include ensuring that there is an evacuation procedure in place to protect anyone on the premises in the event of an emergency; and

- a general 'duty of care' obligation to ensure that preparations have taken place for potential emergencies that might occur – this includes identifying potential hazards that might arise because of an emergency and ensuring that employees will not be, as far as practicable, exposed to them.

The 'responsible person' is defined as the person who, at the workplace, is an employer, the main contractor, a self-employed person or the person who has control of the workplace.

In some workplaces, it will be necessary to address issues outlined in more than one section in this document, depending on the type of building, the tenancy arrangements and the use(s) of the building.

The evacuation procedures must be developed in consultation with employees and safety and health representatives (if any).

This document is intended as a basic guide on the development of emergency evacuation procedures and a starting point from which preparations can commence. It is not a substitute for the preparation of specific evacuation procedures that address issues relevant to a particular workplace.

2. Preparing for emergency evacuations

This section provides an overview of issues to consider in preparing for emergencies at all workplaces. Specific legislative requirements are listed in Section 3.

2.1 The main objectives

The main objectives in emergency evacuation planning are to ensure that:

● everyone knows what to do in the event of an emergency; and

● preparations for potential and unexpected incidents at the workplace have taken place.

The types of emergencies to plan for include fire, injuries, rescues, incidents with hazardous substances, bomb threats, armed confrontations and natural disasters.

2.2 Key points

Emergencies can happen at any time in any type of workplace, such as a fire in a delivery van, an armed hold-up in a delicatessen, a chemical spill in a workshop or a bomb threat at a shopping centre.

The approach is to eliminate or reduce the risk of injury or harm that may occur during an evacuation by undertaking a three-step process of:

● identifying potentially hazardous situations;

● assessing the risks; and

● implementing control measures.

The emergency evacuation procedures should be developed after this risk management process has been conducted.

All workplaces must have evacuation procedures that have been specifically developed for the particular workplace and its specific hazards and cover a range of potential incidents.

Training in set evacuation procedures and clear escape routes are key principles to reduce the loss of life and the risk of injury. Any shortfalls indicated during training should be quickly addressed.

A 'complex' workplace, such as a multi-tenanted building, will require detailed planning together with co-ordination and communication with all tenants in the establishment of evacuation procedures.

At all times, the emergency evacuation procedures should be developed as part of broader emergency planning to deal with emergencies of all kinds.

2.3 Development of procedures

The amount of detail in the evacuation procedures will depend on the complexity of the workplace.

Where applicable, the evacuation procedures should address:

● the activation of alarms and alerting staff and other people on site;

● the best way to evacuate the building or site;

- the range of situations that may arise, such as incidents with hazardous substances, explosions, medical emergencies, armed hold-ups, bomb threats and earthquakes;

- all the people who may be at the workplace, including visitors and tradespeople, and activities which may affect the evacuation, such as alcohol consumption in a bar or repair work;

- employees or other people who will require special assistance to evacuate;

- the speed of the evacuation — some emergencies will take only a very short period to become a significant emergency and evacuating all people from the building or site as quickly as possible must be a priority;

- all the areas under the control of the employer/manager;

- clear definition of roles and responsibilities — this includes establishing clear reporting lines with distribution of information on who is in control of a particular area;

- the selection of key people to manage the evacuation procedures, such as appointment of floor wardens;

- the training of all staff and specialist training for those with key roles;

- regular drill practice;

- rescues, with consideration given to:

    - how the immediate rescue of a person will be managed; and

    - what logistical support and devices (such as fall-arrest systems) will be provided;

- access for emergency services (such as ambulances) and their ability to get close to the building or site;

- the location of main and alternative assembly areas;

- the selection of people responsible for head counts and 'return to work' procedures;

- the placement of instructions and maps around the building or site;

- the distribution of emergency phone numbers;

- the use and maintenance of fire extinguishers, including:

    - the best way to control or extinguish a fire;

    - the training of employees who may be required to use fire extinguishers; and

- regular maintenance of portable fire extinguishers according to Australian Standard, *AS 1851*; and

- regular review of procedures and training.

2.4 Assessment/review

The effectiveness of the evacuation procedures needs to be reviewed on a regular basis.

The review process should consider whether:

- shortfalls found in the procedures during practice drills have been addressed; and

- there is a risk management process in place to ensure any changes at the workplace have been taken into account.

3. Responsibilities at the workplace

3.1 Employers, main contractors, self-employed people and people having control of the workplace

Under the *Occupational Safety and Health Act 1984* and the Occupational Safety and Health Regulations 1996, the employer, main contractor, self-employed person or person having control of the workplace must ensure that the following specific legislative requirements have been met at the workplace.

1.	An evacuation procedure has been prepared. Refer to Section 2 for general issues to address in the planning.	❑
2.	The evacuation procedure is clearly and prominently displayed at the workplace, where practicable.	❑
3.	A diagram showing the location of exits, and the position of the diagram in relation to the exits, is clearly and prominently displayed at the workplace, where practicable.	❑
4.	The evacuation procedure is practised at the workplace at reasonable intervals, where practicable.	❑
5.	The workplace is arranged so that people can safely move within it and the passages for the purposes of movement are always kept free of obstructions.	❑
6.	The means of access to and egress from the workplace enable people to move safely to and from the workplace and at all times are kept free of obstructions.	❑
7.	Emergency exits from a workplace are safe in the event of an emergency and clearly marked, for example, the exits actually work and are not obstructed.	❑
8.	Efficient portable fire extinguishers are provided. These must be located and distributed in accordance with Australian Standard, *AS/NZS 2444.*	❑
9.	Portable fire extinguishers are regularly maintained.	❑
10.	Training is provided on how to use fire extinguishers and other safety equipment to people who will be required to help control or extinguish a fire at the workplace.	❑
11.	Smoking and naked flames are banned from any part of the workplace where there are goods or materials which, in the event of a fire, are likely to burn with extreme rapidity, emit poisonous fumes or cause explosions, and there is a risk of harm or injury from ignition.	❑
12.	The workplace is maintained in a clean condition to avoid hazards to people.	❑
13.	Rubbish, building materials and plant are stored away from footpaths and roadways at the workplace.	❑

3.2 People who have control of a workplace or control of the access to and egress from a workplace, such as the building manager or site manager

Under Section 22 of the *Occupational Safety and Health Act 1984,* people who have, to any extent, control of a workplace must ensure, as practicable, that the workplace and all entrances and exits are safe so that people may enter, leave and use the workplace without exposure to hazards.

This section of the Act applies to a person who has any control of:

● a workplace where people who are not employees of that person are likely to be in the course of their work; or

● the means of access to and egress from a workplace.

This includes owners and lessors of premises who may have no involvement with the work activity carried on by employers or others at the premises but have retained some control over the premises.

The duty imposed by Section 22 relates to the physical condition of the workplace and all access ways used to enter and exit, including roads, walkways, doorways and lifts. Areas of control may also include stairways, car parks and common foyers and gardens shared by tenants. Fire prevention and control and emergency evacuation would be part of the duty to ensure that people at the workplace could exit safely.

Section 22 duties are limited to the areas that are under the person's control and it is important that the areas of control are clearly defined in contracts between parties.

In many instances, an **employer** will have control over their own premises and the responsibility for the means of access and egress to and from the premises. In this case, the employer must also ensure that anyone else's employees are not exposed to hazards on the premises. The employer's duty to provide his or her own employees with a safe working environment still applies and includes the specific requirements listed on the previous page.

The following checklist is a brief outline of the legislative requirements for the person who has control of a workplace or control of the access to or egress from a workplace.

1.	Emergency evacuation procedures have been developed.	❑
2.	Fire prevention and control equipment have been provided.	❑
3.	Entrances and exits are safe and all tenants and any other people at the workplace are able to exit safely, for example, the exits actually work and are not obstructed.	❑

3.3 Public buildings, such as cinemas, hotels and art galleries

The Health (Public Buildings) Regulations 1992 contain specific requirements for emergency evacuation preparations for public buildings.

Where the public building is also a workplace, there are also requirements under the occupational safety and health legislation for emergency evacuation preparations to be met.

Responsibility for undertaking the emergency evacuation requirements will depend on arrangements and who is determined to be the responsible person. Refer to the introduction for a definition of a 'responsible person'.

Where there is a manager, the specific legislative requirements outlined in Section 3.2 of this document may apply. For owner-operators, the legislative requirements outlined in Section 3.1 could apply. These sections should be consulted according to the particular arrangements at the workplace.

The following checklist outlines some of the Health (Public Buildings) Regulations 1992 requirements.

1.	A written emergency plan for the emergency evacuation of the public building is formulated by the occupier of a cinema, licenced premises or any other public building specified by the local government authority and submitted to the local government authority for approval.	☐
2.	The occupier of the cinema, licenced premises or other public building carries out rehearsals of the approved emergency plan at intervals specified by the local government authority.	☐
3.	The occupier of a public building ensures that all fire alarms, hydrants, telephones and other fittings and appliances necessary for the prevention or extinguishment of fires are maintained and comply with Australian Standard, *AS 1851*.	☐
4.	While a public building is in use as a public building, no person is obstructing any lobby, exit, door, gate, corridor, passage, aisle, stairway or gangway or locks any exit door or gate in an exit path.	☐
5.	While a public building is in use as a public building, every lobby, exit, door, gate, corridor, passage, aisle, stairway or gangway of the public building is not obstructed and every exit door of the public building required to be used is not locked.	☐
6.	When installed, emergency lighting is provided and maintained in accordance with the Building Regulations and Australian/New Zealand Standard, *AS/NZS 2293*.	☐
	Note: A copy of the Health (Public Buildings) Regulations 1992 should be consulted for more details. This checklist refers to only partial details of the requirements and is not a complete guide.	

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4. Workplaces with tenants, subcontractors or visitors on site, such as shopping centres, multi-storey buildings and construction sites

Responsibility for emergency evacuation preparations at a workplace with tenants, subcontractors and/or visitors will depend on the tenancy and other legal arrangements, such as whether the owner has contracted a building manager or site manager and who is determined to be the responsible person at the workplace. Refer to the introduction for a definition of a 'responsible person'.

Where there is a building manager or site manager, the specific legislative requirements outlined in Section 3.2 of this document may apply. Where the owner is the responsible person, then the specific requirements outlined in Section 3.1 of this document may apply. These sections should be consulted according to the particular arrangements at the workplace.

The checklist below outlines general issues to consider at workplaces with tenants, subcontractors and/or visitors.

1.	The evacuation procedures are jointly established and take into account all tenants, sub-contractors, workers and visitors in each section on the site.	❑
2.	Communication and alerting systems have been established.	❑
3.	The procedures address all types of situations and hazards which may arise and the complexities.	❑
4.	The procedures cover all people who may be on the site, including visitors, customers, tradespeople and those who cannot speak English, and activities that might affect the evacuation such as repair work.	❑
5.	Procedures are developed for people who will require special assistance to evacuate, including people with a disability, particularly those with a sight or hearing disability.	❑
6.	Main and alternative assembly areas are established.	❑
7.	Wardens are appointed for each section.	❑
8.	Information is provided to all occupants on emergency evacuation.	❑
9.	All tenants are informed of who will be in control in an emergency.	❑
10.	Up-to-date floor plans have been distributed to all tenanted areas.	❑
11.	Training and drills are coordinated so that all tenants take part.	❑
12.	A method has been established for ensuring inductions on evacuation procedures are always provided to new staff, building users and visitors.	❑
13.	Alarms are regularly maintained and tested.	❑
14.	Emergency lighting is regularly checked.	❑

5. Workplaces with people sleeping on site, such as backpacker accommodation and hotels

Responsibility for emergency evacuation preparations at a workplace with people sleeping will depend on arrangements, such as whether the owner has contracted a manager, and who is determined to be the responsible person. Refer to the introduction for a definition of a 'responsible person'.

Where there is a manager, the legislative requirements outlined in Section 3.2 of this document may apply. For owner-operators, the legislative requirements outlined in Section 3.1 could apply. In addition, specific emergency requirements for public buildings (outlined in Section 3.3) under the Health (Public Buildings) Regulations 1992 may also apply. These sections should be consulted according to the particular circumstances at the workplace.

The checklist below outlines general issues to consider at workplaces with people sleeping on site.

1.	Communication and alerting systems have been established.	❏
2.	The procedures address all types of situations and hazards that may arise and the complexities, such as fire arising while people are sleeping.	❏
3.	The procedures cover all people who may be on the site, including visitors, customers, tradespeople and those who cannot speak English, and activities that might affect the evacuation, such as alcohol consumption in a bar or repair work.	❏
4.	A system is established where there is a checklist of occupants, and a person responsible for it, so that it can be checked to see if all people are out of the accommodation and emergency services can be advised of missing people.	❏
5.	Procedures are developed for people who will require special assistance to evacuate, such as hostel residents, non-English speakers and people with a disability, particularly those with a sight or hearing disability.	❏
6.	Roles and responsibilities are clearly established so that everybody knows who will be in control in an emergency.	❏
7.	The procedures take into account the need to maintain orderly evacuations and prevent panic when there may be people very unprepared for the emergency, for example, some people could be disoriented or confused if woken suddenly or affected by alcohol, drugs or medications.	❏
8.	Main and alternative assembly areas are established.	❏
9.	Information is provided to all occupants on emergency evacuation.	❏
10.	Diagrams showing the location of exits and position of the diagram in relation to the exits are displayed. These should be indicated to visitors as they arrive.	❏
11.	A procedure has been established for ensuring that there are inductions on evacuation procedures for new staff, building users and visitors.	❏
12.	The evacuation procedures are practiced at regular intervals and include all staff (both permanent and casual) to ensure all know what to do in an emergency and can assist those who may not know what to do. Records should be kept and maintained on who has received training.	❏
13.	Alarms are regularly maintained and tested.	❏
14.	Emergency lighting is regularly checked.	❏

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6. Where to go for further information

6.1 Documents

- Australian Standard *AS 1851* series on maintenance of fire safety systems;
- Australian Standard *AS 2118 Automatic Fire Sprinkler Systems*;
- Australian Standard *AS 2419 Fire Hydrant Installations – System Design, Installation and Commissioning*;
- Australian Standard *AS 2441 Installation of Fire Hose Reels*;
- Australian/New Zealand Standard *AS/NZS 2444.1 Portable Fire Extinguishers and Fire Blankets: Location and Selection*;
- Australian Standard *AS 3745 Emergency Control Organisation and Procedures for Buildings*. This includes:
    - appointment of the emergency planning committee;
    - establishment of an emergency control organisation;
    - preparation of emergency plans and procedures;
    - role and authority of emergency control personnel while executing duties;
    - fire, bomb threat and civil disorder procedures;
    - typical floor evacuation and location diagrams;
    - typical training;
    - typical emergency evacuation exercise observers' checklist; and
    - typical bomb threat checklist;
- Australian Standard *AS 4083 Emergency Response for Healthcare Facilities*;
- Health (Public Buildings) Regulations 1992*;*
- *Occupational Safety and Health Act 1984* and Occupational Safety and Health Regulations 1996*;* and
- Safetyline Institute online lectures, *Emergency Workplace Evacuations and Building Fire Safety* (available on the internet at www.safetyline.wa.gov.au).

Commission for Occupational Safety and Health documents:

- *Codes of Practice: First Aid Facilities and Services, Workplace Amenities and Facilities, Personal Protective Clothing and Equipment*;
- *Guidance Note: General Duty of Care in Western Australian Workplaces*; and
- *Guidance Note: Working Alone*.

Commission documents are available on the internet at www.safetyline.wa.gov.au and from WorkSafe.

6.2 Organisations

WorkSafe
Department of Consumer and Employment Protection
5th Floor, 1260 Hay Street
WEST PERTH WA 6005
Tel: (08) 9327 8777
Internet: www.safetyline.wa.gov.au

For Australian standards:
Standards Australia
165 Adelaide Terrace
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