



Emergency Response Procedures in High Hazard Work Environments

Emergencies are never planned and happen when we least expect them. This is why it is important for every employer to have plans and procedures in place for what to do when an emergency takes place. Employers need to look at the activities and work tasks their company undertakes and create emergency procedures based on these actual and potential emergencies identified that could occur. Regardless of low hazard work sites, such as a retail boutique clothing store in a city, or high hazard worksites, such as a drilling rig in remote northern Alberta, emergency response plan must be relevant to the company's scope of work.

When creating an emergency response plan, employers need to consider several things, such as:

- Hazard level of work undertaken.
- High risk activities.
- Equipment and material used.
- Number of workers per shift.
- Number of shifts a day.
- Distance to medical facilities.
- Employees trained in First Aid.

Based on Part 7 of Alberta's OHS Code - Emergency Preparedness and Response – emergency response plans must include the following:

- The identification of potential emergencies.
- Procedures for dealing with the identified emergencies.
- The identification, location and operation of procedures for emergency equipment and personal protective equipment.
- The emergency response training requirements.
- The location and use of emergency facilities.
- The fire protection requirements.
- The alarm and emergency communication requirements.
- The first aid services required.
- Procedures for rescue and evacuation.
- The designated rescue and evacuation workers.

Part 7 of Alberta's OHS Code provides information regarding the rescue and evacuation workers. This is where emergency response procedures can get complicated. It is essential workers are able to be rescued when a situation arises. This is why employers must involve affected workers in establishing their emergency response plans and that plan is current. Additional planning may be required, especially if your company has workers involved in high-risk activities, such as confined spaces, at heights, around H₂S gas, to name a few. Rescue procedures not only need to be written and posted, but also practiced.

Everyone involved in the rescue procedure needs to have the essential training relevant to the rescue type required. This may include training for confined space, fall protection, H₂S, first aid, etc.

Some things to consider are:



- Do workers know the risks involved with the rescue procedures?
- Are workers physically capable of undertaking a rescue?
- Are workers trained on the specialized equipment required for rescue procedures?
- Is all equipment onsite/available for use?
- What maintenance/inspection schedule is in place for rescue equipment?
 - o Fall protection equipment
 - o SCBAs
 - o Mobile equipment
 - o EWPs
- Are 3rd party rescue service providers involved?
 - o High angle rescue
 - o Confined space
 - o EMS

Part 11 of Alberta's OHS Code outlines the requirements for first aid. Requirements include the number of employees trained in first aid based on the hazard level of the workplace/site, number of workers per shift, number of shifts per day, type of first aid kit, transportation in place to take workers to medical aid (EMS, workers, medivacs, etc.), methods of communication such as cell phones, radios, air horns. When medical aid is a distance away more equipment, supplies and level of first aid training for first aiders is increased.

Part of ensuring rescue procedures are relevant and practicable, is practicing them. Rescue procedures for high-risk activities need to be practiced at reasonable intervals to ensure all involved in rescue procedures are competent. This may be monthly, quarterly, or yearly based on risk and another element to ensure competency for rescue workers.. All aspects of the rescue need to be reviewed and amended if needed. For example, in a confined space rescue drill it may be found that the SCBA oxygen bottle was empty due to the valve not being adequately turned off from the previous drill. This outcome could be life threatening in a real-life situation. Practicing these drills will aide to ensure in the event of an actual emergency rescue occurs as planned.

The most important part of emergency response planning is prevention. This goes along with ensuring your health and safety program has involved all employees, worker tasks and activities are defined, hazards are constantly identified, controlled and communicated, adequate training is provided and taken, and drills practiced.