

## **Be Prepared: Not Just a Girl Scout Motto**

In wake of the accidents occurring at the Indianapolis State Fair, much is being stated regarding blame, costs, fault, etc. With finger-pointing occurring in all directions, many are anxious and interested to see how this situation concludes. Regardless of whether someone (or an organization) thinks, "It can't happen to me", companies need to remember that emergencies of all kinds can occur and should an emergency happen, preparations may want to be considered.

### **What is an emergency?**

Many organizations do not have a communication plan for emergencies. Again, the mindset of "this will not happen to me" seems to sink in very early on in the minds of most. Additionally, getting a plan going may also show an organization how unprepared they truly are, which can lead some groups to think they do not want to be viewed as "not having their ducks in a row", or not being prepared. And let us not forget the costs associated with hiring an agency/company to not only develop the plan, but implement the plan as well. During the last two years, the weakened economy has forced numerous cutbacks for organizations across all industries. Sure, an organization can choose to develop and implement on its own, however costs associated with this process may need to be justified and the justification (with the respect to costs) may be difficult during recession-type atmospheres.

In simplest terms, [Merriam-Webster](#) defines "emergency" as an unforeseen combination of circumstances, or the resulting state that calls for immediate action or an urgent need for assistance or relief. Though you may think an emergency has to be on a large scale or of a catastrophic nature in order to have a plan in place, a workplace emergency truly needs one thing - an appropriate response.

### **Liken the thought of a workplace emergency plan to being proactive.**

Regardless of the type of workplace emergency (and how it is rated on a catastrophic scale), if an emergency occurs, knowing how to proceed will decrease additional problems from occurring. [Sefarth and Shaw LLP](#) remind us of the BP Gulf Disaster from 2010. Most of us can remember the images and news reports regarding the unforgettable oil spill. What seemed to anger scores of citizens was the fact that no one

knew how to handle the situation. And as [Sefarth and Shaw](#) point out, employers should have a catastrophe response plan in place that addresses basic issues such as

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- Who will be the corporate executive responsible to act as the “lead” in the event of a workplace catastrophe;
- Who will be on the catastrophe response team;
- What steps should be taken in the minutes, hours and days following a catastrophe;
- How to deal with federal, state and local agencies who investigate workplace catastrophes (e.g., OSHA, EPA, Chemical Safety Board, Police, Fire);
- How to conduct root cause investigations;
- Whom to contact for insurance claims;
- How to respond to the media;
- How to assist company employees dealing with the stress and grief that is the natural result of a serious workplace accident.

[Source: BP Gulf Disaster: A Powerful Reminder To Update Your Company's Catastrophe Response Plan](#)

Not sure if your organization needs to have a catastrophic response plan? You may want to rethink it. Replace the word “catastrophic” with “emergency” in the above bulleted list to see if becomes more applicable. Perhaps many of the points will apply. Regardless of an organization’s choice to update a current plan, or implement a new one, having a workplace emergency plan in place (prior to one occurring) can save organizations time, money and may potentially save lives.