**EMERGENCY PLANNING**

Emergency planning aims to prepare for and mitigate the impacts of an emergency. Preparedness requires identifying what resources are needed and how to respond. Therefore, it involves accumulating knowledge and skills, information about the management of potential emergencies, providing and allocating facility resources and people to deal with the emergencies identified. These plans should also have a relationship with other management systems i.e. safety management, environmental management, and risk management systems.

Emergency Plans are an important duty that every local church must, by law, prepare, maintain, and implement. These procedures include:

* an effective response to an emergency
* evacuation procedures
* the notifying of emergency response services
* medical treatment and assistance i.e. first aid
* effective communications between an authorized person (usually a leader) and all persons on site
* testing of these procedures and how often they should be tested
* information, training, and instruction to relevant workers with relation to the implementation of the emergency procedures.

**The use of the term *'emergency'***

Interpretations of the term *'emergency'* may depend on a person's background and experience. In general, an emergency is a situation that harms (or threatens to harm) people, property, or the environment. Therefore, every facility must develop an emergency plan to define those circumstances that constitute the activation of emergency procedures. A simple guide for an emergency is:

* if someone is seriously injured
* if someone needs urgent medical help
* if there are threats to property or life
* or a witness to a serious crime or accident.

**Levels of Emergencies:**

**Level 1** - An incident that can be managed locally with resources and skills on-site.

**Level 2 -** An emergency that requires Emergency Services to attend.

**Level 3 -** An emergency that will impact the site and other sites beyond the boundary.

**Types of emergencies**

The types of emergencies to plan for may include fire, explosion, medical emergency, rescues, incidents with hazardous chemicals, bomb threats, armed confrontation, and natural disasters.

The emergency plan should be based on a practical assessment of hazards associated with the activity of the church and the possible consequences of an emergency occurring because of those hazards.

External hazards should also be considered in preparing an emergency plan, for example, the chemical storage facility neighboring the church site.

**Preparation of The Emergency Plan**

Emergency planning should be a cyclical process, meaning that all the stages are inter-related, and the plan details should be continually evaluated, revised and as appropriate, adjusted.

A diagram of emergency preparedness

Description automatically generated

***An emergency management committee should never find themselves off the wheel of emergency preparedness planning.***

**Consultation**

An emergency plan should be done in consultation with all members affected by the plan. These may include facility personnel, neighbors, local authorities, or emergency services. Consider whether there are tenants that use your facility i.e. other denominational gatherings, community support groups, etc...

**Writing the Emergency Plan**

Specific emergency procedures are an important part of the emergency management system. They should be clear, simple, practical, and achievable. They do not have to be lengthy or complex. In preparing the plan, it needs to be tailored to the specific church considering relevant matters such as:

* the nature of activities carried out on site
* the nature of the hazards on the site
* the number and composition of the people on site
* the size and location of the site, for example, remoteness, proximity to health services

***Not everyone has experience with health and safety so anybody should be able to pick up the document and understand it without much explanation.***

**Examples of important inclusions in an emergency plan**

An emergency plan may include practical information such as:

* emergency contact details for key personnel who have specific roles or responsibilities under the emergency plan i.e. first aid officers
* Contact details for local emergency services i.e. poison information center
* Evacuation procedures including arrangements for assisting any hearing, vision or mobility-impaired people
* A map of the site illustrating the location of fire protection equipment, emergency exits and assemble points
* Post-incident follow up process i.e. debriefing, notifying the conference, organizing, counselling for trauma cases

**Contacting Emergency Services**

When an emergency occurs and emergency services are contacted, the operator often asks for specific information required to assist in dispatching the most appropriate response to your emergency. **It is important that this information be at hand** - Examples of this information can include:

* Site address and the phone number you are calling from if it's a landline
* The nearest cross street (this is a question all emergency services operators ask when assigning a team
* Emergency Vehicle access point
* Emergency Vehicle meeting point
* Name of the first aid officer or leader of the emergency response team

**If your site is attended to by emergency services, directions given by workers must be complied with.**

**Access to the Emergency Plan**

Emergency plans should be readily accessible by all who attend the site. A summary of the key elements can be displayed on a noticeboard. Every time it is updated, it should be communicated with all members and then practiced at the first opportunity.

**Training in Emergency Procedures**

Workers and volunteers must be adequately trained in emergency procedures. Arrangements for information, training and instruction must be set out in the emergency plan itself.

Training mechanisms may include but are not limited to:

* Practicing evacuations (commonly called drills)
* Demonstrations of how to shut down power and equipment
* Location of emergency equipment and how to use it (the latter should be done by a professional)
* Accredited training for specific roles i.e. First Aiders

**Reviewing Emergency Plans**

The currency of the emergency plans is important to ensure they remain effective. After an emergency it is important to debrief on what worked and what did not - this is information you would use to update and revise your emergency plan. Other factors may include but are not limited to:

* After the plan has been tested.
* If something new has been introduced to the site i.e. another structure, new machinery, a new tenant, or refurbishments
* A considerable change to the number of people that frequent the site i.e. two churches merging membership, an increase of staff
* If new activities are introduced to the site.