

Preemptive Measures to Ensure Employee Safety During Emergencies

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PRACTICES Labor and Employment, OSHA

Hurricane season serves as a reminder that emergencies and disasters can strike at any time—threatening employee safety, and increasing the risk for workplace injuries and illnesses. Because employers are obligated to keep their employees safe during working hours, it is important to consider the health and safety of their employees *before* emergencies strike.

In preparing for an emergency, employers should be cognizant of 29 C.F.R. 1910.38, which requires all workplaces subject to a required OSHA standard, with over 10 employees, to create a written Emergency Action Plan (“EAP”). Under the standard, an EAP must include: 1. Procedures for reporting an emergency; 2. Evacuation policies; 3. Measures for employees to follow who stay to operate critical plant operations before evacuating; 4. Strategies for accounting for employees after evacuation; 5. Policies for employees to follow when performing rescue or medical duties; and 6. Names or job titles of all persons who can be contacted by employees who desire more information or further explanation about their duties under the EAP. In addition to the EAP, OSHA also requires that employers ensure they do the following: have and maintain an employee alarm system, which utilizes a distinctive signal for each purpose; designate and train employees to assist in safe evacuation; and review the EAP with each employee covered by the plan.

Finally, OSHA provides a list of suggested emergency preparedness actions to further protect employees. Some suggested policies include: arranging training drills for responders and employees; posting emergency numbers in the workplace; and appointing staff to be responsible for inventorying and maintaining emergency equipment and supplies.