

PREPARING TO SHELTER IN PLACE

ISSUES FOR WORK PLACES TO CONSIDER

Sheltering in place means staying inside whatever building you happen to be in at the time of an emergency or, if you are outside, going into an undamaged building nearby and staying there for a period that may last hours to several days. Officials are likely to instruct people to shelter in place if an explosion or chemical spill releases toxic dust, fumes, radiation, or chemicals outside. Community residents may want to protect themselves this way if an emergency like an electrical blackout or snowstorm makes it very difficult or unsafe for them to go anywhere else. Depending on when the emergency occurs, some people are likely to be in a place other than their home – for example, at work, school, or shopping – apart from other household members.

When almost 2,000 diverse community residents in the *Redefining Readiness* demonstration sites considered what they would face in a shelter-in-place emergency, they identified many issues that are critical to their protection. If you want *your* work place to be prepared to deal with this kind of emergency, get together with other people there to consider the questions below. These questions are designed to stimulate thinking about important issues, some of which you may not have considered before. There are many right answers, but don't expect to have answers right away. Instead, as you consider the questions together, decide which issues are relevant to your particular work place and how your work place can best address them.

If you want your household and the places your children go on a regular basis to be prepared, take a look at *Issues for Households to Consider* and *Issues for Schools and Early Childhood/Youth Programs to Consider* too.

For more information about the problems people face trying to shelter in place, examples of specific actions that can be taken to resolve those problems, and an inclusive process for using this issue set, please visit www.redefiningreadiness.net.

I. RESPONSIBILITY FOR PROVIDING SHELTER

- (1) **Who is the work place responsible for protecting in a shelter-in-place emergency?**
 - Does this group include employees who work in the building?
 - If the work site is a public place, does this group also include customers, clients, students, patients, or visitors?
 - Are dependent children in the work place on a regular basis? If so, you may also want to review *Issues for Schools and Early Childhood/Youth Programs to Consider*.
- (2) **What is the maximum number of people who could be inside the work place at the time of an emergency?**
- (3) **Under what circumstances will employees and other people inside be *instructed* to protect themselves by sheltering inside the work place building?**
- (4) **Under what circumstances will employees and other people inside be given the *option* to protect themselves by sheltering in the work place building?**
- (5) **Does the work place employ anyone who works outside?**
 - In the event of an emergency, is the work place responsible for providing shelter for these employees?

II. COMMUNICATION

- (1) **How will the people sheltering in the building communicate with the outside world during the emergency?**
 - If some forms of communication are not operational during the emergency, does the work place have back-up ways to receive and send information?
- (2) **How will information about the emergency be transmitted to employees and the other people inside?**
 - Do current strategies communicate effectively with everyone, including people who are hearing impaired or don't speak English?
 - Do current strategies clearly distinguish emergencies in which people need to shelter in place from emergencies in which people need to evacuate the building?

- (3) **Do employees in the field have two-way communication devices so they can be informed of the emergency and call for instructions or help?**
- (4) **Does the community have a hot-line or website that the work place can contact to report the condition of the building and the people inside during an emergency?**
 - Do relatives and friends of employees have access to this information so they can find out how their loved ones are?

III. PROTECTION FROM TOXIC SUBSTANCES OUTSIDE

- (1) **What actions will be taken to prevent toxic substances from coming into the building?**
 - How many employees know how to close or seal windows, doors, and vents; to disable automatic doors; and to turn off air conditioners?
 - Are instructions for carrying out these tasks readily available so other employees could do them, too?
- (2) **Which room(s) in the building will provide the best protection from toxic substances outside?**
 - Are these “safe” rooms large enough to accommodate *everyone* who is likely to be inside at the time?
 - Will the people in these rooms have safe access to communications, toilet and washing facilities, and critical basic and medical supplies?
 - Will people in the safe rooms have enough space to move around and lie down?
 - How will the temperature be controlled at tolerable levels if the vents and windows are closed?
- (3) **Will people be allowed to enter or leave the building?**
 - What is the basis for this decision?
 - Is there a way for people to enter and leave without exposing the people already inside to dangerous amounts of the toxic substances outside?

IV. BASIC AND MEDICAL NEEDS

- (1) **Does the work place have supplies on hand to meet the basic needs of *everyone* who is likely to be inside at the time of a shelter-in-place emergency?**
 - Do these supplies need to include water, food, and utensils; hygiene, cleaning, and plumbing products; blankets, mats, or sleeping bags; flashlights, candles, matches, and tools; communications, fans and heaters; a generator; and protective clothing?
 - Are other basic supplies needed?
 - Are supplies sufficient to meet everyone's needs for several days?
- (2) **Does the work place need to have an adequate supply of emergency and commonly used medications, emergency and first-aid supplies, and a refrigerator to store perishable medications?**
 - How many employees are authorized to provide medical assistance?
- (3) **Have employees been encouraged to store their own emergency supplies at work?**
 - Do their personal emergency kits need to include a several-day supply of the medications and medical supplies they need?
 - Do their personal emergency kits also need to include food for special dietary needs, personal hygiene products, eyeglasses or contact lens supplies, extra clothes, a sewing kit, towels, a blanket and pillow, and books or other entertainment?
 - Do employees need to store other emergency supplies?
- (4) **Will all of these basic and medical supplies – stored by employees and the work place – be accessible to the people sheltering in the safe room(s)?**
- (5) **Does the work place have procedures for distributing supplies equitably in the event of a shelter-in-place emergency?**
 - Do these procedures assure that people with medical conditions like diabetes will receive the food they need when they need it?

V. EMOTIONAL DISTRESS AND VIOLENCE

(1) How will the work place help employees and the other people inside cope with emotional distress during a shelter-in-place emergency?

- Have employees been given an opportunity to think about these situations in advance?
- Have they been encouraged to make arrangements to assure that the people and animals they care about will be safe if they can't get to them because they need to shelter in the work place?
- If their own phones don't work during the emergency, have arrangements been made to enable employees and other people communicate with loved ones who are not in the building?
- Does the work place have a system to give employees and other people useful tasks to do during the emergency?

(2) How will the work place prevent unruly and violent behavior during a shelter-in-place emergency?

- Have the people who will be responsible for security been trained to keep themselves and others calm?
- Has the work place prepared to minimize building conditions that can make people sheltering in place unruly or violent (such as insufficient food, water, medications, and hygiene facilities; overcrowding; and extreme temperatures)?
- Does the work place have a system to limit people's access to weapons and alcohol?

(3) Does the work place have an alternative to locking the doors during the emergency?

VI. EMPLOYEE RESPONSIBILITIES, INCENTIVES, AND SUPPORTS

(1) What is expected of various employees during this kind of emergency, and what training have they received to meet their responsibilities?

(2) Does the work place provide any employees with bonuses or other incentives for staying on the job during an emergency?

(3) What if critical employees leave or don't show up?

- Does the work place have back-ups for the people in charge as well as everyone else who will be playing important roles during the emergency?

- Is important information about the building readily available so other people who may need to take over will know where things are and what to do?
- Does the work place have policies to protect employees' jobs and income if they can't get to work because they are sheltering somewhere else during the emergency?

VII. EMERGENCY PLANNING PROCESS

- (1) Who has been involved in developing the work site's plans to respond to a shelter-in-place emergency?**
 - What has been the role of employees who work in the building?
 - Has the process involved anyone else who is in the work place on a regular basis (such as customers or clients)?
 - What has been the role of employees who work outside?
- (2) Who is aware of the work site's shelter-in-place plans and how have they been informed?**
 - What do employees and the members of their households know?
 - What do other people who are in the work place on a regular basis know?
- (3) How has the work place practiced its plans and evaluated the effectiveness of its plans?**
- (4) How often does the work place review and modify its plans?**
- (5) What kinds of incentives or supports would help the work place prepare for sheltering in place?**

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