



What's New At CEU Plan

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Emergency Plan
Review
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When was the last time you looked at your emergency plan?

If you said, "What emergency plan?" or "I think it's here somewhere," or "Five years ago," your emergency plan might be more of a hindrance than a help in the event of a disaster.

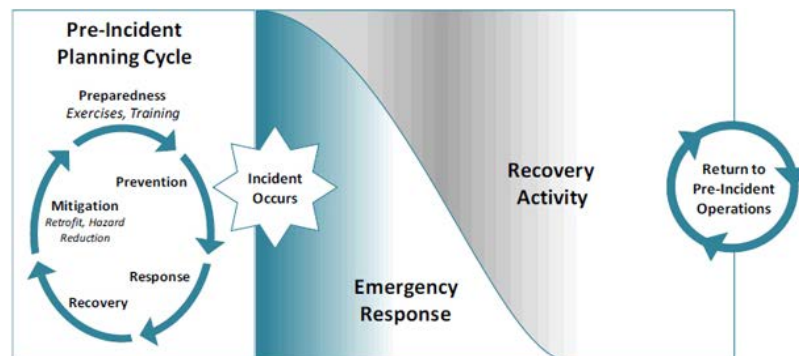
The Public Health Security and Bioterrorism Preparedness and Response Act of 2002 required all Community Water Systems with populations over 3,300 to prepare Emergency Response Plans incorporating the results of a Vulnerability Assessment by the end of 2004. And most wastewater systems are required to have emergency response plans by the state or local regulatory agency. But most utilities prepare emergency response plans because it is just good sense—and part of being responsible for protecting the public health and the environment.

Unfortunately, people sometimes get busy with putting out the everyday fires and their emergency plan sits on the shelf. Before they know it, a year goes by, then two years, then five. If no emergencies or disasters occur, the plan is forgotten.

Then a wildfire, blizzard or chemical spill occurs, and the plan is pulled out of the bookcase. By the time you remove the dust bunnies from the binder and the cobwebs from your mind, you're already one or two steps behind.

Reviewing the Emergency Plan

Below is a great graphic from the U.S. EPA website that demonstrates the importance of having a cycle of activities for preparing to respond to emergencies.



Pre-incident planning incorporates many tasks besides just preparing an emergency response plan and putting it on the shelf. A simple but critical task that every utility should include is to regularly review and update their emergency plan.

Annual Review

At a minimum, the emergency response plan should be reviewed annually, and updated with current information.

Be sure to incorporate any changes in equipment, chemicals, storage locations, and operating procedures. It's a good idea to have a group review and training session with all the affected employees participating.

Check all the contact information to make sure phone numbers, cell numbers, direct connect numbers, email addresses and other pertinent data is correct. Include contact information for employees, media, vendors, contractors, regulatory agencies and emergency responders.

Make sure your plan covers all types of emergencies. If you live in an earthquake-prone area, you might

focus on that type of disaster, but don't leave out other emergencies that can occur. Many of your procedures might overlap from one type of issue to another, but if there are specific activities for certain emergencies make sure those are addressed.

Pre-Disaster Review

If you have a particularly disaster prone season, such as hurricane season in the tropical areas, or wildfire season in arid climates, schedule an emergency plan review prior to the start of the season. That way you can make any changes needed to the plan and begin any preliminary preparations, such as ordering personal protective gear or checking your emergency equipment. Also, be sure to do another check on contact information.

If a disaster is forecast, and you have time, do a quick review of the plan with the entire staff so it is fresh in everyone's mind. Use your plan to guide your preparations and even start on some of your post-disaster planning.

During an Emergency

Your plan should always be in a handy, accessible location. It's great to have your plan online, but hard copies should be readily available in case the computer system is down. While you should be familiar with the plan already, now is the time to actually use the plan. Hopefully it is designed to be easy to use.

If you find discrepancies or errors in the plan, make a note of them so they can be corrected.

Post-Disaster Review

This may be the most forgotten of the emergency plan reviews, but may also be the most important.

Review your plan considering how your team responded to the disaster.

Was the plan easy to follow? Was the information current? Did the procedures work or did your team have to come up with alternate ways to handle the emergency?

Look at what went right and what went wrong, and improve your emergency plan for the next time you need it.

The U.S. EPA has many helpful documents for preparing emergency response plans, including guidance documents for water systems and wastewater systems.
