

Workplace Safety: Companies aren't OSHA Compliant

Are we all in denial about emergency response planning?

There's trouble brewing in the American workplace. Some would say there's always been trouble brewing; we just don't want to admit it. But admitting it and planning for it are key to ensuring that when it does happen we are ready. That's the message that [Bo Mitchell, president of 911 Consulting](#) is delivering.

"This is America and we're all in denial about emergency response," says Mitchell. "It's not going to happen to me; it's only going to happen to the other guy. And maybe it won't happen to him either."

Mitchell's company provides emergency preparedness services, including training and ensuring employees and managers know how to prevent and respond to workplace incidents. The biggest hurdle he comes up against in emergency response planning, he says, is denial.

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"It's a cultural thing," he says. "We don't like to talk about it... Research from the American Red Cross and the National Safety Council says that 99-plus per cent of American families don't have an emergency plan."

No Experience with Adversity

People in Europe, Japan, and other populations that have experienced adversity are infinitely better at emergency planning than we are, says Mitchell. "By 1945, at the end of WW2, the British, Russian, American and Japanese armies had flattened everything. And these countries are used to talking about these things. They have living relatives who have been through this, the fires, the explosions. This doesn't surprise them. It seems to surprise everyone in the US."

He marvels at the number of Fortune 500 and Fortune 100 organizations that don't have OSHA-compliant emergency plans. "It's epidemic. It's ubiquitous," he says.

The first step to addressing the problem involves figuring out what your company needs. "Have you done an outside independent assessment of your emergency plan and training? I think that's the key. If all of these things are the problem, this is the solution. Do the assessment and fix it," says Mitchell.

Keys to an OSHA-Compliant Emergency Plan

“You’ve got to have a plan that recognizes that we are subject to emergencies,” says Mitchell. Not only does this make sense for the preservation of your business, but it’s also the law.

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There are three basic elements that every plan should have to be compliant with OSHA regulations.

- a written emergency plan
- a team of employees designated to lead during an emergency
- training for all staff on emergency response procedures

Preparation and Training

And you must be ready for “all hazards”, stresses Mitchell. “We don’t just train for fires and weather and the power going out, as important as all those things are. You don’t get to decide which emergency you plan for... because you never get the emergency for which you plan... And a fire this week is going to be different from a fire three years from now. You have to have all hazards planned: earthquakes, landslides, explosions, chemical spills inside, chemical spills outside. To be OSHA compliant you have to have a written plan for all hazards, a team and train all employees.”

Training should be ongoing, says Mitchell. “You don’t learn how to drive a car well or use a computer well if you only train [for] it once, or even once a year. You have to do this stuff over and over again, because repetition is the mother of learning. And some of this stuff is complicated.”

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Dawn Lomer is the managing editor at i-Sight Software and a Certified Fraud Examiner (CFE). She writes about topics related to workplace investigations, ethics and compliance, data security and e-discovery for the company blog and industry publications. Through her interviews with industry experts and attendance at conferences and seminars, Dawn has developed broad knowledge of the subjects she covers.