

Emergency Response Teams

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Fire Wardens and Fire Marshals are essential for workplace safety, but to save lives and reduce business interruption during a range of incidents, forming an Emergency Response Team is essential preparation.



Emergency Response Teams



Introduction

The rapid deployment of a dedicated and efficient Emergency Response Team (ERT) aids the safe evacuation of employees during a range of events. It can also greatly minimise the extent of property damage, financial loss (including brand reputation) and overall impact to the business. Investing in such a valuable emergency resource for your business makes sound financial and business sense.



Why Have an ERT?

In recent years the trend has been to limit the use of ERTs to assisting with safe evacuation only, with most workplaces appointing Fire Wardens and Fire Marshals in this respect. In the UK this has been driven from the regulatory requirements set out in fire safety legislation such as the [Regulatory Reform \(Fire Safety\) Order 2005](#) which requires 'The Responsible Person' to:

- Establish and, where necessary, give effect to appropriate procedures, including safety drills, to be followed in the event of serious and imminent danger to relevant persons
- Nominate enough competent persons to implement those procedures insofar as they relate to the evacuation of relevant persons from the premises

As a result, many businesses overlook the other potential benefits of having a properly selected, skilled and equipped ERT. They can play a vital role to make the business more resilient when faced by a range of significant workplace incidents, including:

- Fire and smoke contamination
- Explosion
- Flood or water ingress
- Wind and windstorm
- Freezing conditions/snow
- Escape of fluid
- Chemical and biological leak/spill
- Gas leak
- Security incidents
- Denial of access, etc.

It's not just events directly associated with your site that can cause disruption. Your ERT also need to consider events in your local vicinity or a broader exposure to your business, e.g., nearby buildings or yard storage, public highways, local airports, etc.

Key Responsibilities of an ERT

Life safety

Legislative requirements reflect the important life safety functions undertaken by an ERT.

- Fire Marshals can guide occupants of a building into escape routes and lead them to a place of safety
- Fire Wardens can sweep areas of the premises to ensure that all occupants of those areas have safely evacuated
- Roll Call Co-ordinators can check that those known to have been in the building have safely evacuated, **alerting the attending Fire Brigade Officer in charge if persons are reported as 'missing'**

Minimising property damage and business interruption

During a fire or explosion, having the right people to support the Fire Brigade when they arrive can greatly assist fire-fighting operations. The correct information can help limit the extent of fire spread and water/smoke damage. In turn, it can also increase the speed at which the business can return to an operative state, reducing the financial impact of the incident.

During a flood or escape of water event, the Fire Brigade may not be summoned, so the presence of a suitably skilled and equipped ERT might be the only way to prevent disaster and a significant financial loss.

Key Roles Within the ERT

Depending on the nature of your business, having appropriate people to fulfil the following roles and responsibilities can make all the difference:

1. Incident controller

Having someone provide this important role is recommended for all businesses.

- Principal point of contact for the Emergency Services, being a conduit for information relayed to and from the organisation
- Allocates available company resources to assist in the mitigation of the incident
- Assumes responsibility for the safety of any personnel deployed in the mitigation of the incident
- Ensures there is wider communication of the status of the incident to affected stakeholders, including nearby businesses and local residents who may be affected. Often this is done in co-ordination with the Emergency Services. Other stakeholders include senior management, employees and affected customers
- Ensures that information about the incident and its mitigation is accurately collated
- Instigates Disaster Recovery and Business Continuity Plans, if required
- Ensures that briefings and debriefings are given to appropriate parties as part of a communications plan

2. First on scene

When a fire alarm activates, many businesses operate a 'staff alarm' procedure. This normally permits an investigation time of a few minutes before the Fire Brigade is automatically summoned by nominated individuals or an Alarm Receiving Centre. Personnel undertaking this function fulfil a vital role and can quickly confirm via a radio or other means whether a real incident is underway. This must always be their primary function, provided they can do so safely.

However, they can also aid safety by keeping other people away from the danger and possibly take action to prevent further damage. First on Scene responders can effectively use a fire extinguisher or activate any fixed fire protection systems that may extinguish the fire, assuming that:

- Company policy permits them
- They have been suitably trained
- The incident is small
- Their means of escape remains unaffected

3. Keyholder

Having a person who is able to unlock doors and gates to permit access by the Emergency Services can speed up their response to the incident, and avoid damage where entry has to be forced. This is recommended for all businesses.

4. Electrician and mechanical engineer

If available, these team members can provide invaluable support during an emergency incident.

- Prompt electrical isolation can allow the Fire Brigade to apply more water, more quickly. When flooding or an escape of water occurs, this can also reduce the likelihood of fire or electrical circuits in equipment becoming affected
- A mechanical engineer can allow prompt mechanical isolation and shutdown of critical operations, process equipment and machinery, reducing the likelihood that it will become damaged in the incident. This helps with providing a more rapid restart of processes and so minimises disruption to the business
- The ability to isolate other utilities such as gas, water, compressed air and steam can help keep firefighters safe and speed up their response to an incident

5. Press officer

In more serious incidents, a person who has received suitable media training can be a valuable member of the team. They can make sure that media enquiries and incursions are handled in such a way as to minimise reputational damage. The importance of this cannot be overstated and is essential to ensure reputational damage does not hinder the recovery of the business, extending the period of lost revenues and profits.

6. Drivers of rider-operated lift trucks and heavy goods vehicles

The ability to remove items, stock and vehicles such as those loading and unloading at the premises can greatly aid any response to an incident, including providing clear access for Emergency Services and unhindered access for any equipment deployed to mitigate the incident, such as flood barriers. This capability also allows removal of stock and equipment from areas that may otherwise be damaged by:

- Smoke
- Water
- Heat and fire
- Blasts or explosions

7. Sprinkler system and pump operators

Where sprinklers are installed in a property, having a person(s) who can monitor the operation of the sprinklers and any associated pumps is important. They can:

- Ensure correct operation and monitor the condition of the operating equipment
- Switch over to any backup pumps should a pump fail
- Direct fire appliances to the location of the fire brigade inlet/connection should pressures need boosting
- Shut-off the sprinklers as soon as instructed by the Fire Brigade, minimising water damage to the premises

The location of key protection equipment such as sprinkler control valves/pumps should be regularly assessed to ensure that they are located in an area of the site, which is not deemed to be vulnerable to loss, e.g., exposure from flood waters.

8. Specialist advisers

Where processes are taking place within a property, the availability of specialist knowledge to the Fire Brigade and Emergency Services can prove especially useful, helping them to remain safe while responding, and providing confidence that they are responding correctly. This can avoid an unnecessarily cautious response, meaning the incident can be dealt with more quickly and effectively. Examples of specialist advisers who may be useful to the Emergency Services include those with specialist knowledge of (not exhaustive):

- Chemicals in use in the process
- Machinery and equipment in use in the process
- Construction and layout of the building or the routing of pipes and services
- Plant safety features and safe shutdown protocols
- Sensitive environmental receptors for smoke and fire fighting water run-off

9. Salvage teams

Once an area of the premises has been declared safe for occupancy by the person in charge of the incident (normally from the Emergency Services), salvage teams can be deployed to those areas to assess the condition of any goods, items, equipment, etc. It is often possible to remove and temporarily relocate any salvageable items to be used as part of the re-instatement process or to be sold-off in an effort to mitigate financial losses.

Getting Your Team Ready

Selecting the right people

Whatever their role, it's important that any person appointed to the ERT fully understands their responsibilities and the impact they can have on the outcome of any incident. Careful consideration should be given to:

- Willingness to volunteer – These are important roles and it is better that staff volunteer to participate than are forced to. Some employers struggle to recruit staff onto the ERT and find that incentives are required
- Availability – ERT members should ideally be available for as much of the time as possible and be able to respond quickly when called upon. Staff who live closer to the site will usually be able to respond more quickly to any incident. Some ERTs only contain volunteers who live within a set distance from the site

- Being psychologically up to the demands of the role – Whether it's decision-making under pressure or the need to wear personal protective equipment (PPE), which can be claustrophobic, the various roles can place psychological demands on individuals which challenge their ability to cope with the pressure of an emergency situation. It is better to find out in advance whether a person is suited to a role in a controlled, safe environment. Many ERTs choose to subject team members to various tests and exercises which evaluate their ability to cope with the pressures and demands of their roles. Formal training courses for roles such as 'Incident Controller' and 'First on the Scene', **which can help evaluate a person's suitability** and assist in preparing them for the demands of the role, are also available

Correct equipment

Depending on the role, ERT members may require access to and be trained in the use of specialist equipment to aid their response. It is good practice to regularly review your emergency procedures and identify foreseeable emergency scenarios which may require support from the ERT using specific equipment.

The equipment needed depends very much on the emergency, for example:

- Flood and escape of water – Provision of temporary demountable flood barriers, sandbags and sand, plastic sheeting or tarpaulin, plywood and timber, tools and nails
- Chemical leak – Specialist PPE and respiratory protective equipment (RPE), spillage granules, absorbent socks, mats and booms, over-drums and waste containers, drain covers and equipment to test for airborne contaminants
- General – Access to forklift trucks, keys, lifting aids, sack trucks and tools

Information packs/Incident control point or room

A key function of the ERT is to support the Emergency Services through the provision of information that can help them manage their response to an incident. It can be extremely helpful to collate in advance an information pack that features information which may be useful to them.

Information that may be useful (not exhaustive):

- Information about **the building's construction and materials used, particularly if aluminium cladding panels or asbestos-containing materials have been used**
- Locations of features that may present hazards to fire fighters and other Emergency Services, e.g., fragile roofing materials, gas cylinders, chemicals, flammable liquids, hazardous processes, plant under high pressure, etc.
- Maps and plans of the premises with fire compartmentation shown
- Details of the routing of ducts and services
- Locations and methods for isolating utilities (e.g., gas, electric, water, compressed air, steam)
- Detailed information regarding the fire alarm and drawings indicating the locations of specific detectors that have activated
- Details and locations of features to assist the Emergency Services such as fire hydrants, firefighting risers, sprinklers and fixed fire protection systems, first aid rooms, environmental protection equipment

For smaller and non-complex premises, this information can be provided close to the main fire control panel where the attending Emergency Services will congregate upon arrival. For more complex premises, the amount of information gathered may be considerable, and it can be helpful to establish an Incident Control Point or Room.

Establishment of an Incident Control Point or Room can be beneficial in a number of ways. It can be:

- A focal point for the congregation and assembly of persons arriving to assist with an incident
- Used to store useful emergency information (detailed above) for more complex premises
- Sited away from the main hazard areas, keeping people away from danger or without access to sensitive areas (e.g., press/media)
- Adopted by the Emergency Services as a support facility for a Silver Command and Control Point, should it be suitably located, designed and equipped and the incident escalates
- Designed to encourage the adoption of good incident management protocols, such as event and response logging

Planning, training and exercising

It is important that ERT members receive regular and suitable training for their roles, to ensure that they are able to respond to an incident in a safe and effective manner. As well as traditional training courses, there is high value in simulating emergency situations in a safe environment, allowing the team members to follow trained emergency protocols while being challenged by the dynamics of an ongoing incident. Such exercises can identify weaknesses in knowledge and training, plans and procedures, or in the suitability of equipment procured to assist the team. These can also develop individual competencies, foster team building and encourage trust and co-operation among team members, which will make them more effective in a real incident.

There are formal training courses for roles such as 'Incident Controller', which are organised by specialist training organisations supporting high hazard industries such as oil, gas, chemicals, mining, etc.

Learning from training exercises and incidents

After a training exercise or an incident, it is helpful to evaluate how things went and gain valuable learning for a more effective response. Examples of issues to consider include:

- Were enough team members present to implement the response plan/mount an effective response?
- Were team members alerted quickly enough to arrive in sufficient time to mitigate the incident?
- Was there sufficient equipment and resources available to mount an effective response?
- Were communications/liaison with the Emergency Services and third-parties effective?
- Did emergency response equipment perform as anticipated?
- Could emergency procedures and protocols be followed, and if not, what were the barriers and problems encountered?
- What information can and should be fed back to those responsible for investigating the cause of the incident?

Summary

A trained and suitably equipped ERT can not only help to ensure employees are kept safe during an incident, but it can also help minimise the extent of losses faced by the business as a result of the incident. Prior planning on what roles and functions may need to be performed, ensuring volunteers are suitably equipped and trained with regular practice and exercises, and adopting an iterative approach to learning from actual incidents, can make an ERT a valuable business asset.

Checklist

A generic Emergency Response Teams Checklist is presented in Appendix 1 which can be tailored to your own organisation.

Specialist Partner Solutions

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For more information please visit:

[Aviva Risk Management Solutions – Specialist Partners](#)

Sources and Useful Links

- [Guidelines for physical capability and functional capacity requirements for emergency response team members](#) - The Energy Institute
- [Emergency Response & Spill Control](#) – HSE
- [Prepare for Flooding](#) – GOV.UK
- [Preparing for Flooding \(EPR and CPMAH Sites\)](#) – Environment Agency
- [Emergency Response Recovery: Non Statutory Guidance Accompanying the Civil Contingencies Act 2004](#) – [UK Government](#)

Additional Information

Relevant Loss Prevention Standards include:

- Business Continuity
- Contamination Following a Fire
- Fire Safety Legislation
- Manual Fire Fighting Water Supplies
- Smoke Contamination

To find out more, please visit [Aviva Risk Management Solutions](#) or speak to one of our advisors.

Email us at riskadvice@aviva.com or call 0345 366 6666.*

*Calls may be recorded and/or monitored for our joint protection.

Appendix 1 – Emergency Response Teams Checklist



Location	
Date	
Completed by (name and signature)	

	Emergency Response Teams	Y/N	Comments
1.	<p>Do you have a formal Emergency Response Plan that identifies what to do for all credible and foreseeable incidents to your activities/site, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fire/smoke? • Explosion? • Flood or water ingress? • Wind and windstorm? • Freezing conditions/snow? • Escape of fluid? • Chemical, Biological leak/spill? • Gas leak? • Security incidents/issues? • Denial of access, etc.? 		
2.	Have you prepared procedures for safe evacuation of all personnel from the premises in the event of an emergency?		
3.	Have you appointed persons to assist with the evacuation and confirm that the premises have been successfully evacuated?		
4.	Is there a suitable means of alerting ERT members of the need to respond to all and any types of incident, e.g., those that are not a fire alarm?		
5.	<p>Can your ERT reliably communicate with each other when they are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On site? • Off site (if needed)? 		

	Emergency Response Teams Contd.	Y/N	Comments
6.	Have you identified the key roles required to support your Emergency Response Plans for protecting: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Life? • Property/asset and business activities? 		
7.	Incident Control Room - Has essential information to assist the ERT and public Emergency Services been collated within a suitably located 'information pack' or Control Room?		
8.	Electrical and Mechanical Engineers - Can the Emergency Services shut down power and other utilities quickly and safely?		
9.	Specialist Advisers - In an incident can a sufficient number of helpers and advisers be summoned to provide advice to the Emergency Services on specific hazards or provide any information which will help minimise impact of the incident on the premises and local environment?		
10.	Fork Lift Truck or HGV Driver(s) - Can a sufficient number of personnel be summoned to assist with the relocation of goods, stock, vehicles and materials, and to assist with salvage operations?		
11.	Sprinkler/Pump Operator - If the site has fixed sprinkler protection, is there appropriately trained persons to respond to the protection systems?		
12.	Press Officer - Has a person been nominated and trained to field enquiries from the media, local residents and businesses, and can these enquires be dealt with away from the incident scene and location?		
13.	Security – Has the role of any on-site security individuals been factored into the ERT? Is the security of the site during the course of an incident considered in the activities of the ERT and the Emergency Response Plan?		

	Emergency Response Teams Contd.	Y/N	Comments
14.	Are enough ERT members available at all times, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When the premises are occupied? • When any processes are operating? • All shifts? • Nights or weekends? • Bank Holidays? 		
15.	Is there appropriate availability of ERT members or trained back up/alternates to cover for sickness or annual holidays within the team (including for all variables as in Question 14)?		
16.	Have ERT members and/or any alternates received adequate training for their roles?		
17.	Is there a sufficient quantity of suitably specified emergency response equipment for the ERT to mitigate foreseeable emergency scenarios? Examples include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fire/smoke? • Explosion • Flood or water ingress? • Wind and windstorm? • Freezing conditions/snow? • Escape of fluid? • Chemical, Biological leak/spill? • Gas leak? • Security, etc.? 		
18.	Is there a programme of regular exercises and practice sessions for ERT members to rehearse response procedures, including their application to specific scenarios?		
19.	Is there a system (and is this recorded) of formally de-briefing ERTs after incidents, exercises and practices, to ensure any identified improvements to procedures, equipment or response techniques are implemented and acted upon?		

	Emergency Response Teams Contd.	Y/N	Comments
20.	<p>Is there a formal Salvage Team for the site or is there a formal contract in place with a recovery/salvage provider as required?</p> <p>Are mitigation measures understood by the ERT to help reduce/minimise the damage during the response to an incident/emergency?</p>		
21.	<p>Is there appropriate liaison with the ERT and the public Emergency Response Services, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ambulance? • Fire? • Police, etc.? 		
22.	Additional comments:		

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