Emergency Response Teams – Property

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.

This Loss Prevention Standard outlines the key roles and responsibilities of Emergency Response Teams along with useful guidance on operating and managing such teams.

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Emergency Response Teams – Property

Introduction

The rapid deployment of a dedicated and well-trained Emergency Response Team (ERT) can help reduce the impact of unexpected risk events such as fire, flooding, escape of water, etc.

This can subsequently help minimise the extent of any property damage and financial loss, including brand reputation, as well as aiding with evacuation procedures and reducing the potential for environmental damage.

Note: This document is focussed on property loss prevention in relation to Emergency Response Teams. It is not intended to address liability exposures. The presumption is that all regulatory requirements, Fire Risk Assessments, and compliance with requirements placed by the local authority having jurisdiction which would include licencing, building permissions, regulations, codes, or standards, have or will be met.

Why Have an ERT?

ERT's have been traditionally used to aid with emergency evacuation, with workplaces appointing Fire Wardens and Fire Marshals in this respect. In the United Kingdom, this has been driven from the regulatory requirements set out in fire safety legislation such as the 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.

However, in addition a properly selected, skilled and equipped ERT can play a vital role in improving business resilience to a range of risks and hazards, including:

- Fire and smoke contamination.
- Explosion.
- Flood or water ingress.
- Storm and wind events.
- Freezing conditions/snow.
- Escape of water and other fluids.
- Chemical and biological leaks/spills.
- Gas leakage.
- Security incidents.

An effective ERT can also consider events in the local vicinity, e.g., nearby premises, public utilities, local airports, etc.

Key Responsibilities of an ERT

Life Safety

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

- Guiding building occupants to escape routes on to a place of safety.
- Inspecting the premises to ensure safe evacuation of all occupants.
- Roll-call checks to ensure occupants are accounted for and alerting the Fire and Rescue Service to missing persons.

Property and Business Interruption

The ERT can support the Fire and Rescue Service upon their arrival with site information, advising on specific hazards or higher risk areas; hydrants; fire protection systems etc., which can assist firefighting deployment, saving valuable time and potentially preventing catastrophic property and business interruption losses.

The Fire and Rescue Service may not be summoned during a localised flooding or escape of water/fluid event, and the presence of a suitably skilled and equipped ERT can be critical in helping reduce the scale of any damage and business interruption.

Key Roles Within the ERT

Depending on the nature of the organisation, the following roles and responsibilities should be considered:

Incident Controller

This important role is recommended for all organisations. Key duties include:

- Principal point of contact for the Emergency Services, being a conduit for information relayed to and from the organisation.
- Allocating available company resources to assist in the mitigation of the incident.
- Assuming responsibility for the ERT team or other workers deployed to help manage the incident.
- Providing incident status updates to affected stakeholders, including senior management, workers, affected customers, local businesses and residents etc. This is often undertaken in conjunction with the Emergency Services.
- Collating accurate incident information.
- Instigating Disaster Recovery and Business Continuity Plans, if required.
- Ensures that briefings and debriefings are undertaken as part of a communications plan and incident review procedures.

First on Scene

When a fire detection system/alarm activates, many organisations will incorporate a short delay to allow for investigation of the detection, in case of false alarm or faulty/damaged detection equipment, before alarm sounders operate and the Fire and Rescue Service are contacted.

In addition to this primary function, First on Scene can also help instigate other measures such as:

- Mitigations to prevent or limit further damage, such as removing combustible materials in proximity to the site of the alarm activation.
- Clearing the area and maintaining it free from workers and other persons.

- Operation of first aid fire extinguishers, or manual activation of fire protection systems provided:
  - ✓ The company policy permits.
  - ✓ They have been suitably trained.
  - ✓ The incident is small.
  - ✓ Their means of escape remain unaffected.

Keyholder(s)

Having person(s) who are able to unlock site gates and entry doors to permit access by the Emergency Services can speed up their response to the incident and avoid damage where forced entry would be otherwise required. The use of designated, trained keyholders is recommended for all organisations.

Electricians and Mechanical Engineers

These team members can provide invaluable support during an emergency incident by isolating:

- **Electrical Systems**. This can support deployment of firefighting resources by the Fire and Rescue Service, and during flooding or escape of water/fluid events, to help reduce the likelihood of electrical fire, or electrical circuits in equipment becoming affected
- **Mechanical Equipment**. Shutting down critical operations, process equipment and machinery, helping to reduce the likelihood of damage during a risk event. This can also help provide a more rapid restart of processes and so minimise disruption.
- **Other Utilities**. Isolating gas, water, compressed air, hydraulic plant and steam can help keep firefighters safe and speed up their response to an incident.

Press Officer

Press Officers ensure 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.

Drivers

The presence of sufficient drivers 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 during the risk event.

Sprinkler System Operators

Where installed, having persons who can monitor the operation of the sprinkler systems, 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.

Specialist Advisers

Persons with specialist knowledge of the premises, equipment, processes etc., can aid the Emergency Services, 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.
- Security arrangements.

Salvage Teams

Once the premises have been declared safe for occupancy, normally by the Emergency Services, salvage teams can be deployed to affected 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.

Operational Guidance

Selecting the Right People

It is important that any person appointed to the ERT fully understands their responsibilities and the impact they can have on the outcome of an incident. Careful consideration should be given to:

- **Willingness**. These are important roles, and it may be prudent to seek volunteers rather than require staff participate. The use of incentives may assist with recruitment.
- **Availability**. ERT members should ideally be available as often 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.
- **Suitability**. Being psychologically suited to the demands of the role, whether 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. Many ERTs require team members to participate in various tests and exercises to evaluate their ability to cope with the role pressures and demands. Formal training courses, 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, should also be considered.

Correct Equipment

Depending on the role responsibilities, some 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 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/Fluids.** 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
- **Other**. Examples include access to forklift trucks; keys; lifting aids; sack trucks; tools; torches, etc.

Information Packs and Incident Control

The ERT can support the Emergency Services via the provision of information packs to help them manage the incident response. Information packs should include, but not be limited to:

- Maps and plans of the premises with fire compartmentation shown.
- Details of hazardous building construction materials, e.g. aluminium cladding panels; combustible composite panels; linings and insulation; asbestos-containing materials etc.
- Locations of hazardous features and equipment, e.g., fragile roofing materials; gas cylinders; chemicals; flammable liquids; hazardous processes; plant under high pressure, stocks of lithium-ion batteries etc.
- Details of the routing of ducts and services.
- Locations and methods for isolating utilities (e.g., gas, electric, water, compressed air, steam etc.).
- 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; other fixed fire protection systems; first aid rooms; environmental protection equipment etc.

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.

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

- A focal point for persons arriving to assist with an incident.
- Used to store emergency information (detailed above) for more complex premises.
- Sited away from the main hazard areas thus maintaining distance from danger.
- A safe location for press/media briefings.
- Adopted by the Emergency Services as a Command and Control Point.
- Designed to encourage the adoption of good incident management protocols, such as event and response logging.

Planning, Training and Exercising

ERT members should receive regular and suitable training for their roles, to ensure 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 established emergency protocols whilst being challenged by the dynamics of an ongoing incident. Such exercises can identify weaknesses in knowledge and training, plans and procedures, or 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', provided by specialist training organisations, including those 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 the response and gain valuable learning to improve response protocols. Examples of issues to consider include:

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

Key Actions

- Appoint a trained and suitably equipped ERT to help implement the site response to emergency events.
- Ensure suitable persons are appointed for the key ERT roles. Thes roles can be demanding and pressurized, and typically suit calm, methodical and organised individuals.
- Ensure appropriate resources and authority are provided to order and support safe evacuation and shutdown of affected areas.
- Adequately plan for a range of possible loss events and carry out emergency simulation exercises to test the planning adequacy and performance of the ERT.
- Learn from incidents and exercises to help continually improve the ERT and response planning.

Checklist

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

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Sources and Useful Links

- London Fire Brigade - Emergency Planning.
- Gov.uk Fire Safety and Evacuation Plans
- Mygov.scot - Planning for Emergencies
- Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service - Business Fire Safety
- Guidelines for physical capability and functional capacity requirements for emergency response team members - The Energy Institute
- Emergency Response and Spill Control – HSE
- Prepare for Flooding – GOV.UK
- Prepare for flooding - Mygov.scot
- Natural Resources Wales - Preparing for a Flood
- NIDirect - Flooding
- Preparing for Flooding (EPR and CPMAH Sites) – Environment Agency
- Emergency Response Recovery: Non Statutory Guidance Accompanying the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 – UK Government

Note: Whilst UK standards and legislation are referenced in this document, other international standards and legislation should be referenced where applicable.

Additional Information

Relevant Aviva Loss Prevention Standards include:

- **Business Continuity**
- **Contamination Following a Fire - Property**
- **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.*

*The cost of calls to 03 prefixed numbers are charged at national call rates (charges may vary dependent on your network provider) and are usually included in inclusive minute plans from landlines and mobiles. For our joint protection telephone calls may be recorded and/or monitored.

Appendix 1 - Emergency Response Teams Checklist

Location	
Date	
Completed by (name and signature)	

	Emergency Response Teams	Y/N	Comments
1.	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: • 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?		
	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?		
	Can your ERT reliably communicate with each other when they are: • On site? • Off site (if needed)?		

	Emergency Response Teams Cont'd	Y/N	Comments
1.	Have you identified the key roles required to support your Emergency Response Plans for protecting Property/asset and business activities in addition to life safety arrangements?		
2.	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?		
3.	Electrical and Mechanical Engineers - Can the electrical power and other utilities be safely shut down power quickly?		
4.	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?		
5.	Fork-Lift Truck or HGV Drivers - 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?		
6.	Sprinkler System Operators - If the site has fixed sprinkler protection, are there appropriately trained persons to respond to the protection systems?		
7.	Press Officers – Have persons 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?		
8.	• 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 Cont'd	Y/N	Comments
9.	Are enough ERT members available at all times, including: • When the premises are occupied? • When any processes are operating? • All shifts? • Nights or weekends? • Bank Holidays?		
10.	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 12)?		
11.	Have ERT members and/or any alternates received adequate training for their roles?		
12.	Is there a sufficient quantity of suitably specified emergency response equipment for the ERT to mitigate foreseeable emergency scenarios? Examples include: • Fire/smoke? • Explosion • Flood or water ingress? • Wind and windstorm? • Freezing conditions/snow? • Escape of fluid? • Chemical, Biological leak/spill? • Gas leak? • Security, etc?		
13.	Is there a programme of regular exercises and practice sessions for ERT members to rehearse response procedures, including their application to specific scenarios?		
14.	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 Cont'd	Y/N	Comments
15.	• Is there a formal Salvage Team for the site or is there a formal contract in place with a recovery/salvage provider as required? • Are mitigation measures understood by the ERT to help reduce/minimise the damage during the response to an incident/emergency?		
16.	Is there appropriate liaison with the ERT and the public Emergency Response Services, including: • Ambulance? • Fire? • Police, etc.?		
17.	Have ERT members and/or any alternates received adequate training for their roles?		
18.	Additional Comments:		

Please Note

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