

Disaster and Emergency Preparedness

A SAFETY TALK FOR DISCUSSION LEADERS

This safety talk is designed for discussion leaders to use in preparing safety meetings.

Set a specific time and date for your safety meeting. Publicize your meeting so everyone involved will be sure to attend.

Review this safety talk before the meeting and become familiar with its content. Make notes about the points made in this talk that pertain to your workplace. You should be able to present the material in your own words and lead the discussion without reading it.

Seating space is not absolutely necessary, but arrangements should be made so that those attending can easily see and hear the presentation.

Collect whatever materials and props you will need ahead of time.

Try to use equipment in your workplace to demonstrate your points.

DURING THE MEETING

Give the safety talk in your own words. Use the printed talk merely as a guide.

The purpose of a safety meeting is to initiate discussion of safety problems and provide solutions to those problems. Encourage employees to discuss hazards or potential hazards the encounter on the job. Ask them to suggest ways to improve safety in their area.

Don't let the meeting turn into a gripe session about unrelated topics. As discussion leader, it's your job to make sure the topic is safety. Discussing other topics wastes time and can ruin the effectiveness of your safety meeting.

At the end of the meeting, ask employees to sign a sheet on the back of this talk as a record that they attended the safety meeting. Keep this talk on file for your records.

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NOTE TO DISCUSSION LEADER:

Bring a copy of your institution's disaster plan so employees can recognize it and review a copy later.

No one likes to think about disasters. We tend to think they won't happen to us. But the truth is, disasters do happen, often when we least expect them. It takes a little time to become familiar with what you should do in response to a disaster. Your response in a disaster situation could mean the difference between life and death, not just for you, but for many others as well.

Disasters are of two basic types: internal and external. Do you know the difference between the two? Can you give examples of each?

Fire, radiological mishaps and severe weather conditions are examples of internal disasters. Civil disturbances and airplane crashes are examples of external disasters; they result in a large influx of patients to hospitals in areas where they occur.

Fire, electrical power loss, severe weather conditions and bomb threats are some of the more frequent types of disasters we must cope with in hospitals. How many of you are familiar with the hospital's written procedures for these disasters?

What should you be doing to plan for disasters?

- ù Familiarize yourself with the disaster plan and review it frequently. Know what actions you and others working in your immediate environment should take in response to the various types of disasters in the plan.
- ù Participate in emergency/disaster drills; they are a very important part of planning for disasters. In fact, the very best plans may not be helpful at all if they are not rehearsed.
- ù In the event that a disaster does occur, carry out your responsibilities as indicated by the disaster plan without delay; be alert for additional instructions.

NOTE TO DISCUSSION LEADER:

At this time, you should show employees a copy of the disaster plan and tell them where copies are kept so they can review the plan.

You should list the types of disasters discussed and describe the signal used on the public address system to identify the type of disaster.

We won't have time today to discuss the proper responses to each type of disaster; however, we will mention briefly two types of disaster situations: tornadoes, because they occur infrequently and we tend not to think much about them, and bomb threats, because they are not announced on the public address system by means of a signal, as the other types of disasters are.

TORNADOES

Who knows the difference between a tornado watch and a tornado warning? Tornado watches are announced by weather stations when conditions in the area are right for the development of a tornado.

This announcement does not mean that a tornado is on the way. If a tornado watch is announced, you should close drapes in your work area--this is to prevent flying glass and objects from hitting people if a tornado develops; be alert for further instructions.

If a tornado warning is issued, you should move patients to interior corridors and close doors to rooms that have windows. You should remain in the interior corridors and wait for further instructions. Should conditions require it, you may be requested to move patients to lower levels of the building.

BOMB THREATS

Ninety-nine percent of all bomb threats are just that--threats. But because there is no way of knowing whether an actual bomb exists, we must take precautions when any bomb threat is received. If you receive a bomb threat on the telephone, here is what you should do:

- Keep the caller on the phone as long as possible and signal to someone else to notify the hospital operator on another line that a bomb threat is being made.
- Try to get information about the bomb from the caller, such as the type of bomb -and where it is located, but don't be "pushy."
- ù Avoid excitement in your voice.
- Write down a detailed account of the call and deliver it to security immediately. The account should include: time of call, voice quality, an accent (if noted), and slurred speech, (suggesting influence of alcohol or drugs).
- ù Keep the call confidential, unless you are directed by security officers to do otherwise. Bomb threats, understandably, tend to make people panic.
- ù Report any suspicious-looking devices to security. Explosive devices can have a variety of appearances, depending upon whether they are military (rare), commercial or homemade. Do not touch suspicious-looking devices.

We can never predict with certainty when disasters will occur. All we can do is attempt to minimize damage to life and property. The hospital administration is responsible for formulating a well-developed plan for each type of disaster that may be encountered, and your responsibility is to be thoroughly familiar with each plan so you can carry out the plan immediately. Remember, your life and the lives of others depend on it.