Australian Government

Australian Public Service Commission

APS Inclusive Workplace Emergency Practices Guide

Purpose

This document features better practice guidelines to ensure that workplace emergency practices are inclusive of all staff within the Australian Public Service (APS). It has been developed with input from APS agencies and incorporates research in best practice from around the world.

The considerations in this guide could be incorporated into existing workplace emergency procedures.

Scope

This guide focuses on emergency procedures for people with disability, although the suggested practices could be applied more broadly to ensure procedures are inclusive of all staff.

It is not an extensive emergency procedure manual, as all agencies and buildings require localised plans that adhere to Australian standards. It suggests ways to incorporate more inclusive practices in existing general processes.

People in building at time of emergency

This guide concentrates on standard procedures for those working for and on behalf of APS agencies. However, it is important to ensure that all visitors in a building are aware of what to do in any emergency. Visitors may include staff from other government agencies, consultants, contractors, members of the public, and family members of staff.

- All staff should be aware of emergency procedures and participate in drill/trial emergency procedures.
- Visitors should rely on direction from building wardens and stay with their building escort in an emergency situation. Processes for visitors with disability should be considered and emergency information should be available if requested.

Staff visiting another APS building should follow the procedures of that site.

Staff working from home should call triple zero (000) in an emergency.

Operating hours

This guide focuses on best practice procedures during business hours. Agencies should ensure that emergency procedures are also in place after hours, which may differ from standard working hour procedures.

Types of emergency

An 'emergency' is any uncontrolled event that requires an immediate emergency response. Such events are those that have resulted in, or have the potential to result in, injury (physical or psychological), illness, or damage to equipment or property.

Agency procedures should consider all types of emergency situations. These may include:

- Fire
- Medical emergency
- Bomb threat
- Hazardous spill/leak
- Armed hold-up/assault
- Siege/hostage
- Staff or visitor aggression
- Suspicious packages
- Civil disorder
- Power outage
- Extreme weather/natural disaster

Categories of emergency procedures

In most cases the above emergencies require either evacuation or lock down procedures. This guide focuses on the more common evacuation procedure, but many practices could also be applied to a lock down procedure.

Inclusive emergency practices

Where agencies are co-located in a building, it may be useful to standardise the processes and information mentioned below to aid consistency in processes for building wardens.

Accessible information

All documents, and information published online, should be created in an accessible format to ensure people with disability can easily access and review the information.

The following considerations ensure that information about emergency procedures is accessible to all staff:

- Emergency exits should be clear, including illuminated green exit signs.
- Emergency and evacuation procedures should be clearly displayed on appropriate signage around the building.
- Contact officers, such as Fire Wardens and first aid officers, should be easily located and contacted by staff. Information could be presented on appropriate signage around the building.
- All emergency procedure manuals, Intranet content and any other means of written communication to staff should be written in plain English and meet accessibility standards (WCAG 2.0).
- Information to staff should be available in a variety of formats e.g. braille, audio, text, diagram.
    - A visual representation such as a diagram, table or checklist is a useful format to provide a call to action to staff detailing the key actions they need to undertake an emergency situation. These 'to do' lists could be tailored and available for the different types of emergency.

Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan (PEEP)

What is a PEEP?

Any employee requiring assistance during an emergency should have a Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan (PEEP). A PEEP details individual considerations and evacuation procedures in an emergency situation.

Who should complete a PEEP?

A PEEP should be completed by anyone who requires assistance during an emergency situation, including people with temporary injuries that restrict everyday activities. Medical evidence or certification is not required to complete a PEEP.

It is the responsibility of each individual to identify their need for a PEEP to the Chief Warden. It is always best to discuss and develop **emergency procedures with individuals** as each person is different and they will be the experts in knowing the assistance they require.

Emergency procedure information, and PEEP awareness, should be included in on-boarding processes for new staff, and easily accessible to all staff at all times e.g. available on the agency intranet page.

PEEPs should be approved and retained by the Chief Warden. In an emergency, the Chief Warden will make emergency personnel aware of employees who may require assistance.

Individuals should review their PEEPs regularly and submit any updates to the Chief Warden.

Features of PEEPs

PEEP forms will differ depending on agency and building requirements. Generally, the plans include the following information:

- Collection notice for personal information (detailing storage of information and disclosure) to ensure individuals' privacy is maintained
- Instructions on how to complete the PEEP form
- Employee's details (name, building location, contact number)
- Employee's general pattern of work in office, if part time or casual
- Employee's acknowledgement of understanding the emergency procedures
- Preferred method of notification of emergency
- Preferred method of notification about updates to emergency procedures
- Assistance required. This may include assistance with:
  o Special equipment*
  o Service/assistance animals
- Evacuation/egress procedure for evacuations (step by step details)
- Designated assistant/buddy and their contact details**
  o Is assistant trained in emergency response procedure?
  o Is assistant trained in using evacuation equipment?
- Issue date and review date of PEEP
- Signatures of the employee, assistant, and Chief Warden.

* If the need for specialised equipment is identified during the PEEP development process local emergency services should be engaged to provide advice on implementation of the engineered solution or product. Specified equipment should be sourced from suppliers who can provide risk assessments, safe usage information and training for their products. Following installation, the Chief Warden and equipment supplier should conduct appropriate training.

**An assistant/buddy can aid the evacuation of a person who requires assistance. The individual should nominate their assistant and ensure they are comfortable with the requirements of the role. Multiple assistants could be nominated in case of absence. Designated assistants should be trained in emergency procedure response and may wish to be trained in using evacuation equipment. Assistants should not be a Fire Warden or First Aid Officer as this may create a conflict of interest in an emergency situation. Exceptions may be made where the person requiring assistance is a visitor to the building.

Assisting people with disability

PEEPs

There are many types of temporary and permanent disabilities which may need to be considered in a workplace emergency situation. It is likely that people with permanent disability will have a PEEP in place. PEEPs will detail individual's procedures to be followed in an emergency, and may be a catalyst for an agency to purchase and install specific equipment. Assistants nominated in PEEPs for people with disability should be aware of the advice in this document, and develop specific processes with their buddy.

Wardens

People requiring assistance who may not have a PEEP should alert a floor warden in an emergency.

Wardens should be trained in communicating with and assisting people with disability, including using specialised equipment.

The mental health of people responding to and/or impacted by an emergency, such as Fire Wardens and people with disability, should be considered. Debriefing an emergency situation, including discussion on lessons learned for future, may assist in supporting people particularly impacted by an emergency situation.

Building and agency considerations

Agencies may wish to consider emergency refuges, such as separate rooms adjacent to emergency exits or enlarged landings within fire stairwells, to accommodate people who may require assistance during an emergency.

People requiring assistance should be included in any emergency procedure training drills, including trial building evacuations. If participating in a trial evacuation would exacerbate a condition, individuals may chose to remain in an emergency refuge for the drill but should be aware of the process and actions required in a real emergency situation.

Employees who identify as having ongoing medical conditions, who do not require a PEEP, should consider carrying a medical card or wearing a medical bracelet. In an emergency situation this may assist emergency personnel, and agency First Aid Officers, identify any potential issues more quickly.

Considerations for assisting people with disability

The below list is not exhaustive but provides some assistance considerations for some common disabilities:

Physical - mobility impairments

Including, but not limited to, people using a wheelchair, people who are easily fatigued, people who have breathing or balance problems, people who are unable to walk quickly or use stairs, and people with hidden illnesses such as heart disease.

- Assistant to escort the person to an emergency exit or stairwell
- Assistant to stay with the person, do not leave them or try to carry them down stairs
- Floor Warden to advise Chief Warden of the person's location and fire brigade will evacuate the person

Sensory - deaf or hard of hearing

- Install a flashing light alarm, including in bathrooms
- Turn room lights on and off again to gain the person's attention
- Look at the person directly
- Use simple language
- Give visual instructions and use gestures to supplement speech
- Write a note stating the type of emergency and evacuation plan
- Assistant to stay with person and escort them if required

Sensory - blind or low vision

- Install tactile ground surface indicators on approach to the fire stairs to indicate a change of terrain
- Install brightly coloured step edges in fire stairwells
- Assistants to act as a sighted guide by offering the person their elbow
- Assistants to be descriptive when verbally giving information, advise of any obstacles
- Assistants to orient the person to their surroundings if evacuated

Intellectual, psychosocial or other

Including, but not limited to, people with cognitive or intellectual disabilities, people who experience extreme confusion in emergencies, people with anxiety or other mental illness, people with head injury, stroke, acquired brain injury.

- Move to a quiet/private area to communicate, if necessary
- Deliver instructions in small steps
- Be patient and flexible
- Assistant to stay with person, do not leave them or try to carry them down stairs

Service/assistance animals

- If the animal becomes scared or disoriented in emergency, ask the owner to assist in calming the animal
- Evacuate the service animal with the person where possible.