

Shelter in Place - Workplaces

Introduction

What does “shelter in place” mean? Shelter-in-place is a precaution aimed to keep you safe while remaining indoors. (This is not the same thing as going to an evacuation centre in case of a storm.) You may be given an instruction to shelter-in-place in an emergency where hazardous materials have been released into the atmosphere. Shelter in place means selecting a small, interior room, with no or few windows, and taking refuge there. It does not mean sealing off your entire home or office building. If you are told to shelter in place, follow the instructions provided in this fact sheet.

Public health significance

Chemical, biological, or radiological contaminants may be released accidentally or intentionally into the environment. Should this occur, information will be provided by local authorities on television and radio stations on how to protect you and your family. Follow instructions of local authorities and know what to do if they advise you to shelter in place.

Action to take

- Close the business.
- If there are customers, clients, or visitors in the building, provide for their safety by asking them to stay not leave. When authorities provide directions to shelter in place, they want everyone to take those steps now, where they are, and not drive or walk outdoors.
- Unless there is an imminent threat, ask employees, customers, clients, and visitors to call their emergency contact to let them know where they are and that they are safe.
- Turn on call-forwarding or alternative telephone answering systems or services. If the business has voice mail or an automated attendant, change the recording to indicate that the business is closed, and that staff and visitors are remaining in the building until authorities advise it is safe to leave.
- Close and lock all windows, exterior doors, and any other openings to the outside.
- If you are told there is danger of explosion, close the window shades, blinds, or curtains.
- Have employees familiar with your building's mechanical systems turn off all fans, heating and air conditioning systems. Some systems automatically provide for exchange of inside air with outside air – these systems, in particular, need to be turned off, sealed or disabled.
- Gather essential disaster supplies, such as non-perishable food, bottled water, battery powered radios, first aid supplies, torches, batteries, duct tape, plastic sheeting, and plastic garbage bags.

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- Select interior room(s) above the ground floor, with the fewest windows or vents. The room(s) should have adequate space for everyone to be able to sit in. Avoid overcrowding by selecting several rooms if necessary. Large storage closets, utility rooms, pantries, copy and conference rooms without exterior windows will work well. Avoid selecting a room with mechanical equipment like ventilation blowers or pipes, because this equipment may not be able to be sealed from the outdoors.
- It is ideal to have a hard-wired telephone in the room(s) you select. Call emergency contacts and have the phone available if you need to report a life threatening condition. Mobile telephone equipment may be overwhelmed or damaged during an emergency.
- Use duct tape and plastic sheeting (heavier than food wrap) to seal all cracks around the door(s) and any vents into the room.
- Bring everyone into the room(s). Shut and lock the door(s).
- Write down the names of everyone in the room, and call your business' designated emergency contact to report who is in the room with you, and their affiliation with your business (employee, visitor, client, customer).
- Keep listening to the radio or television until you are told all is safe or you are told to evacuate. Local officials may call for evacuation in specific areas at greatest risk in your community.

Acknowledgement:

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Related links:

- Emergency Management Queensland (EMQ) at website:
www.emergency.qld.gov.au/emq/css/beprepared.asp
- Emergency Management Australia Community Awareness Publications at website:
www.ema.gov.au/www/emaweb/emaweb.nsf/Page/Publications