



SBMA's Safety Newsletter

From Your Communications' Team at Southern Building Material Association, Inc.

SBMA'S SAFETY EDITION

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Welcome to Your Current Edition of the Safety Newsletter.

Monthly Safety Update

"The Voice of the Carolinas, Tennessee and Virginia Building Material Industry."

When Tragedy Strikes: Eleven Tips for Your Workplace Response

Tragedies Affect the Workplace

By Susan M. Heathfield

For Americans and many around the world, the Kennedy assassinations, the Challenger and Columbia shuttle explosions, the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the bombing of the World Trade Center and Pentagon, and the devastation from Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans and along the Gulf Coast head the list of America's incomprehensible tragedies.

Personal Tragedies Affect Workplaces: In our workplaces, more personal tragedies also occur regularly. Coworkers and their family members die. Customers file for bankruptcy and leave hundreds unemployed. Manufacturing plants burn down. Friends are diagnosed with terminal illnesses. An incident of workplace violence leaves coworkers dead.

While not as riveting and all-encompassing as major, national tragedies, the more personal, closer-to-home tragedies and the national, bigger-than-life tragedies have much in common for people in workplaces.

National Tragedies Affect Workplaces: To start, we frequently find out about national tragedies while we are at work. We gather with coworkers watching national news unfold on televisions and computer screens. We gather in groups and talk about the event.

We share information and talk incessantly. We reach out to understand how the tragedy is affecting our associates. We look out for each other. As an example, many of us watched the planes crash into the World Trade Center while at work.

With the more personal tragedies, our actions and wishes are likely less public, but there

is that same sense of wanting to do something to help and not knowing what to do.

In most instances, for positive mental health, we reach out to each other for friendship and support. Sometimes, it's the more personal tragedies about which we feel the most inadequate. After all, they are occurring right here - and we should be able to help.

A national tragedy or a personal tragedy has a huge impact at work. And, organizations can help people successfully weather the tragedy. They can ease the passage people experience during tragedy. They can help people deal with the helplessness and grief they experience during tragedy. They can provide a support system to help prop people up during grief.

These ideas will help you help your employees as they experience either a national tragedy or the regular, life-changing tragedies that occur within your own workplace.

Recommended Actions During Tragedy

Make Sure People Are Safe: If the incident is happening in your workplace, make certain people are safe before you do anything else. Implement your disaster plan, ring the fire alarm, do whatever your company emergency evacuation plan prescribes for safety. The plan should designate a meeting location, where attendance can be taken, so you know the members of your work force are safe.

Cut People Some Slack: People cannot return to productive work immediately upon hearing about a tragedy. If you expect them to continue working, people will make errors and mistakes because they are distracted by the events or information. Don't pretend. Just tell people that it is all right to focus their energy on the happening. If you do this, most individuals will return to productive work more quickly when their need for information and interests are satisfied.

Assess the Personal Involvement of Employees: If the tragedy impacts an individual personally, offer release time, support, a ride, help obtaining information, and anything else the individual appears to need. For major and direct impacts on your workplace, you may need to decide whether to continue paying employees, even though they are not working, for a period of time. You may offer shelter, relocation, or other forms of compensation during tragedy, too.

Give People Information: If you can do so without totally disrupting work, provide televisions and computer screens so workers are informed about events as they unfold – even if only in break rooms. In more personal tragedies, give all employees as much information as possible, as soon as the information is available. (I do not mean providing employee confidential information, but other information is essential.)

Information helps people process the events. Turn on radios, broadcast breaking news over your speaker system and recognize that people will call friends and acquaintances to share information and compare notes. The closer you are to the tragedy, the more people will want to know.

These seven ideas will help you help your employees as they experience either a national tragedy or the regular, life-changing tragedies that occur within your own workplace.

Provide Places for People to Gather and Talk: Many people take comfort in being close to other people when tragedy strikes. You can informally provide opportunities for this interaction by leaving conference rooms with televisions unused. Wheel the television into a break room. Bring in lunch for your staff so people are encouraged to spend time with each other for encouragement, shared grief, and support.

Suggest a pot luck lunch for the second or third day, depending on the nature of the tragedy. Many people talk incessantly during a tragic event; others suffer silently. You will want to draw your silent people out when possible. Central gatherings will help.

Schedule a Meeting to Share Information: In a national tragedy, people want to know the latest information about what is happening. They want reassurances that they and their loved ones are safe. In more personal workplace sorrows, correct information is also important.

Without breaking the confidentiality of the people involved, and with their permission, tell people as much as you can. The more legitimate information people have, the less likely they are to depend on rumors, the less time they spend seeking information.

Give People Something to Do to Help: In times of sorrow, when people draw together for sustenance, many want something to do to help solve the problem or to ease the situation. In the instance of the terrorist attack on America, stories of volunteerism, sharing of food and space, giving blood and helping out neighbors and friends abounded. The same kind of stories dominated the Gulf Coast residents' response to Hurricane Katrina.

People want to bring a casserole to the bereaved family, send flowers to honor the dead and the living, send memories of the employee to the family, and make donations to favorite charities.

Several of my clients held company meetings to bring people up-to-date and share how to donate to relief and the location of the nearest blood donor center during the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

Others hold company raffles, with the money designated for donations; they purchase raffle items with American Express travel points and employees donate other offerings for the raffle. Many employers match the amount collected. Some companies match employee donations up to a certain amount of dollars with a receipt from the charity. I am sure you can imagine more ways to help that are congruent with your workplace culture.

Make Managers and HR Staff Available: Supervisors and HR staff members are critical company members during tragedy. In a study done years ago by the American Psychological Association, employees overwhelmingly listed personal attention from the

supervisor as one of the most rewarding aspects of work. Free up your calendars when tragedy strikes and spend time walking through the workplace and meeting with people who need support or just a listening ear. Be visibly available.

Offer Employee Assistance: If your company has an Employee Assistance Program or counseling available via your health plan, make sure employees know it is available for people who need it. Some programs offer counseling in the workplace. Explore possibilities.

Be Prepared Before Disaster or Tragedy Strikes: Every organization needs a disaster plan. You also need plans for fire, tornadoes, hurricanes, earthquakes, and any other natural disaster that can occur in your area. All employees should be trained in the specifics of the plan. Prepare people about what actions to take if they are confronted with potential injury in the workplace. Think about whatever is likely to happen and make a plan to handle it – in advance.

Workplace Safety Tips

Workplace Safety Tips To Promote Safety In The Office

Accidents happen in the office, not as frequent compared to the yard and/or shop maybe but when it does, it is just as serious. Tripping, slipping, and falling ranks second to automobile accidents nationwide. Well okay it did not all happen in the office. Accidents of this nature happening in the office are a big part of incidences though. The good part is that most of these are prevented from happening with a few simple tools and reminders.

Keep the walkway clear.

Boxes and bundles, cables, wires and items carelessly piled are tripping hazards. Most times, these are just oops events, other times they are not.

Look before you sit.

Incidents of someone missing the seat often promote silent giggles but this actually could happen to anyone who would not take the time to reach for the chair before sitting down. Leaning back on the chair could end with your back to the floor. This is common to people who are thinking or are trying to reach something, misjudging balance. The person may pick himself or herself up as quietly as possible with nothing serious but an injured ego, sometimes though it does not end up as happily.

Even with all the computerization in the office, filing cabinets are still in much use.

Nothing very wrong here except that filing cabinets are heavy. Opening all drawers of the cabinet at the same time tips the balance of the cabinet towards you. Likewise, leaving a drawer open is a bump waiting to happen.

Don't read while walking.

No one saved impressive time by reading while walking, yet this is a very common practice dumb and true. If you have to read while walking, be sure that no one is doing the same thing that you do. If you must, do not walk into the direction of the coffee

station.

Don't carry anything higher than your eye level.

Carrying loads higher than the eye level impresses no one. See how people refuse to walk towards you?

Do not run, relax.

Running may save a few seconds, after that you will take a breather for several minutes more.

Refrain from putting anything atop cabinets.

Cabinet drawers are for storing supplies. The top of the drawers is not.

Use the handrails.

Stairway handrails have its reason for being. Use it. People who do not use the handrail tire easy.

Use the elevator whenever necessary.

When carrying loads, wait for the elevator. The stairs are not worth the extra calories that you will burn.

Watch where you step.

Smooth surfaces are not always safe surfaces to step on especially in darkened aisles.

Water could be dripping. Be safe. As they used to say, watch your step, this is truer when there is poor lighting.

Don't eat at your workstation and in front of your computer.

Eating in the workplace saves time. Be sure though that it is not done near computers and other electrical equipment. Accidents caused by water must be avoided at all cost.

Other simple measures that are taken that could go a long way in promoting workplace safety is reporting unsafe conditions, loose steps, burned out lights, defective equipment, overloaded sockets, hay caramba! The list is long. The benefits though are immense.



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