

Workplace threat incidents can happen anywhere and at any time. Being prepared can make all the difference. Emergency situations could be anything from a natural disaster, bomb threat, gas leak, suspicious package, physical endangerment and much more.

It is impossible to create a plan, let alone drill for every conceivable eventuality, however there are a number of response actions we can put in place to vastly reduce the opportunity for harm to come to our workforce. To initiate the development of a good response plan you have to decide what type of occurrence would require a response. Remember you are not expected to cover off *everything*, but rather do think about what *could* happen.

Lockdowns are one such response. A lockdown procedure identifies how to keep any persons from moving from an area of lower risk to an area of higher risk and can be just as important as evacuation procedures.

What 'lockdown' means: Lockdown is a term used to describe securing a building or site by controlling the access and/or egress of people to and from a workplace. A workplace would usually trigger a lockdown for significant threats or hazards that impact on the health, safety, or security of people and assets in the workplace.

There are three broad types of lockdown:

- full lockdown
- partial lockdown
- staged lockdown.

Full lockdown: A full lockdown means halting all movements in and or out of a workplace to exclude or contain people to keep them safe from harm. In many ways, a lockdown is the opposite of an evacuation. An evacuation moves people from a dangerous situation to a less dangerous situation. By contrast, a lockdown holds people in safer situations and prevents them from moving to a less safe situation - whether that is inside or outside of the workplace.

Partial lockdown: A partial lockdown means halting movement in and/or out of part of a workplace instead of the whole facility or building or place. Partial lockdowns can apply to one place or to a number of places. Multiple partial lockdowns can also occur at the same time or over time.

Staged lockdown: Staged lockdowns are pre-planned and are triggered in response to an evolving hazard or threat.

Other responses: There are other sorts of organisational responses that are similar to or related to lockdowns such as: holding people in situ and providing emergency shelter.

- Holding people in situ: This is when a workplace may ask people to remain in a workplace until some external threat has passed. These tend to be ad hoc, temporary arrangements. For example, a workplace may want to prevent people from exiting a building because there is a potentially violent protest occurring outside - even if the protest is not specifically focused on the organisation or workplace. These tend to be voluntary but they may also involve locking exterior doors, for example.
- Emergency shelter: Workplaces may sometimes encourage people to remain inside a workplace until some sort of external hazard, like a natural disaster, has passed or there is no longer an imminent threat. These tend to be event-based, temporary arrangements. They also tend to be voluntary and not involve actually 'locking the facility'. A lockdown is an emergency response to protect people inside a facility from a dangerous internal or external event

Source: www.healthandsafety.govt.nz

KEY CONSIDERATIONS:

Emergency situations can be chaotic and any kind of panic will only worsen the situation therefore practicing these drills regularly helps everyone to know their responsibility and enables staff to feel confident and secure that they know what to do should an incident occur.

Key points to consider for workplaces that identify the need for a lockdown response.

- **Challenge your assumptions:** Don't assume "it won't happen here"
- **Responsibilities:** good leadership is vital for organisation and to prevent panic. Choose these people carefully, they will need to be able to think rationally under extremely unfamiliar circumstances. You may want to go outside the traditional 'senior management – don't worry, I've got this!'. It is not always the case
- **Making the call:** When do you make the decision to call off your lockdown? You may want to wait for police advice or make an agreed decision with other managers. What would be the most effective means of communicating lockdowns to staff?
- **Safe space:** do you have a room that is not visible from the outside of the building? Could you fit blinds or curtains to prevent outside observation?
- **Supplies:** establish an evacuation kit that includes staff lists / rosters and plan for the provision of food, water, and washrooms during extended lockdowns
- **Restricting Access:** check if your doors can be automatically and remotely locked and who will / how to activate this
- **Communication to staff offsite:** how you communicate staff that work outside / offsite
- **Customise plans:** Put in place emergency plans for all locations, site specific and incorporated into site emergency plans
- **Personal plan for emergencies:** have employees make a personal plan for emergencies during work hours - The civil defence have a great template for

Employees to use to develop a personal plan:

<http://www.getthru.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/personal-workplace-emergency-plan.docx>

- **Practice:** Run a drill once a year to familiarise staff - providing increased comfort levels during a crisis and reducing panic - be aware that simulations can be triggering / traumatic for some and ensure that you offer assistance to employees and they are aware of where to seek support
- **Develop, Train and Communicate:** Develop protocol and train all staff to understand their role during an emergency, review with staff annually, consider developing a quick reference to emergency plans as a wallet card or poster, and training for staff in de-escalation techniques.
- **Consult with staff:** Any lockdown procedure requires employee buy-in and participation, thereby making consultation during development of procedures essential.

Remember that your staff are people, they will be worried, even scared by events that are outside their control. They may be indirectly involved through family or friends. We need to understand that the way our colleagues react may be out of character and not what we would expect. They need support during and after an extraordinary event.

RESOURCES

- Ministry of Education: Planning and preparing for emergencies and traumatic events
<https://www.education.govt.nz/assets/Documents/School/Supporting-students/Emergencies-and-traumatic-incidents/Emergency-Planning-Guidance.pdf>
- Getting Thru Personal Plan for Emergencies
<http://www.getthru.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/personal-workplace-emergency-plan.docx>
- More information about preparing your workplace for emergencies can be found on: the Ministry of Civil Defence and Emergency Management website; the business.govt website; and the WorkSafe website.