

Creating a Shelter-in-Place Emergency Plan



“Shelter-in-place” refers to selecting an interior room(s) within your facility or ones with few windows, and taking shelter there. It is common for local authorities to advise to shelter-in-place via radio or television. Situations that may require you to shelter in place include natural disasters; accidental or intentional release of chemical, biological or radiological material; or an emergency safety situation, such as in the event of an active shooter. Different threats require slightly different sheltering recommendations. Examples of situations that may cause employees to shelter-in-place include an explosion at a facility that contains dangerous chemicals or an accident that leaks hazardous materials near your facility.

Should You Stay or Go?

The first important decision to make in the event of an emergency is whether your employees should remain inside or evacuate. There should be a plan for both events and you should have an understanding of how to decide if there is immediate danger based on common sense and available information.

At times, local authorities may not be able to provide information immediately regarding what is occurring and proper steps to take. Use information that is readily available to assess your situation. For example, you may want to shelter-in-place if there are large amounts of debris in the air or if reports state the air is badly contaminated.

You should continuously watch TV, check the Internet, or listen to the radio for information or instructions officially given by authorities as it becomes available. If your area is told to evacuate or seek medical treatment, follow the instructions immediately.

When creating a shelter-in-place emergency plan option, make sure to remember the following:

- Establish a plan to alert your employees to shelter-in-place that is easily recognized from an evacuation signal.
- Train all employees regarding their roles and the procedure to shelter-in-place.

Shelter-in-Place Procedure

Specific shelter-in-place procedures will vary based on your facility, but may include the following:

- Closing your business.
- If you have customers, clients, or visitors in the building, provide safety and request that they remain in the building until authorities say it is safe to leave. Shelter-in-place directions from authorities are meant to be taken immediately.

- If the threat is not imminent, request that employees, customers, clients, and visitors call their emergency contact to let them know where they are and that they are safe.
- Turn on call-forwarding or a similar system if you have it. If the business has voicemail, indicate in your recording that the business is closed, and staff and visitors are sheltered in the facility until authorities announce it is safe to exit.
- In a quick and organized manner, lock exterior doors and close windows, air vents, and fireplace dampers. Have properly trained employees turn off all fans, heating and air conditioning systems, clothes dryers, or any other system that manage air exchange from inside to outside.
- If you are informed of danger such as an explosion, close window shades, blinds, or curtains and move to a room without windows if available.
- Gather essential disaster supplies or keep them stored in the designated shelter-in-place area. Supplies include nonperishable food, bottled water, battery-powered radios, first-aid supplies, flashlights, batteries, duct tape, plastic sheeting, and plastic garbage bags.
- To effectively shelter, you must first consider the hazard and then choose a place in your building that is safe for that hazard. For example, for a tornado, a room should be selected that is in a basement or an interior room on the lowest level away from corners, windows, doors and outside walls.

The safest locations to seek shelter vary by hazard. The shelter-in-place area should have enough space for everyone to be able to sit. Select several rooms if necessary to avoid overcrowding. Rooms could include large storage closets, utility rooms, pantries, copy or conference rooms with no or few exterior windows. Avoid rooms with mechanical equipment or any equipment that may not be able to be sealed from the outside of the building.

- Ideally these rooms will have a hard-wired telephone. This phone should be used to call emergency contacts or to report a life-threatening condition.
- Once you have entered the designated area, seal all windows, doors, and vents with plastic sheeting and duct tape or in any similar method available.
- Precut plastic sheeting (sheeting that is heavier than food wrap) could be stored to be readily available in a shelter-in-place emergency. Cut each piece several inches taller and wider than the space needed to be covered so it lies flat against the wall. Label each sheet with the location that it covers.
- Write a list of everyone in the room, including their names and their affiliation with your facility (e.g. employee, client, visitor, etc.), and call your facility's designated emergency contact.
- Check the internet, watch TV or listen to the radio for further instructions from authorities until you are informed it is safe to evacuate or additional information your area may need to know.

*Sourced from OSHA

Additional Information:

The following websites provide additional information on Shelter-In-Place:

- [Chemical Stockpile Emergency Preparedness Program \(CSEPP\)](#).
- [Design Guidance for Shelters and Safe Rooms](#)
- [Learn How to Shelter in Place](#).