

Teaching Guide

Public Assembly Fire Safety

for staff



Public Assembly Fire Safety

Instructor Outline

Introduction

■ Goals:

To ensure that public assembly employees are knowledgeable in emergency response and fire prevention.

■ Objectives:

Employees should be able to:

- describe the emergency procedures for their facility in case of fire.
- identify common fire hazards and how to prevent them.
- demonstrate the correct manner in which to assist in guest evacuation.
- identify special situations or individuals that may require an emergency response different than the standard response.

■ Materials:

- Your facility's emergency response plan
- Handouts (obtained from Seattle Fire Department) *Fire Evacuation in Places of Public Assembly, Fire Safety for Special Events, Fire Extinguishers, Nightclub Fire Safety*
- Video (obtained from Seattle Fire Department) *Public Assembly Fire Safety*

Instructor Information

Public Assembly Fire: Human Factors

■ Panic or Denial?

Panic is often attributed as the primary cause of death in public assembly fires. The truth is inaction, denial and fear of appearing foolish cause more deaths.

The early stages of a public assembly fire are characterized by ambiguity and are often misinterpreted by the public. In a restaurant, for example, smoke is often assumed to be from the kitchen and non-threatening. Groups tend to rely on the staff for information. If the staff fail to provide leadership and direction, the evacuation is further delayed.

■ **Research shows:**

- Early behavior is characterized by uncertainty, misinterpretation, indecisiveness and seeking more information. This delay is critical because failure to act quickly in the early stages of a fire is a primary cause of death.
- The earliest cues to fires in public assemblies are strange noises like breaking glass and extra activity by others, not flames and smoke.
- There is a strong sense of hierarchy in a fire emergency. Guests look for and respond to leadership from staff and management.
- Both the public and staff often meet the sound of a fire alarm with indifference. People tend to be skeptical, concluding that it is either a drill or a false alarm.
- Guests do not use escape routes that are unfamiliar to them. The staff needs to make sure all emergency exits are clearly posted and utilized in an emergency.
- Fire extinguishers are rarely used in a public assembly fire.

Seattle Fire Code Requirements

■ **Section 403**

Section 403 of the Seattle Fire Code places minimum requirements on the owners of public occupancies. Requirements for public assembly occupancies of over 100 people include the development of emergency plans, conducting quarterly fire drills, and providing training to staff members regarding the fire response procedures.

If your facility is required to conduct quarterly fire drills you must also document each drill. Information documented should include the date and time of drill as well as members of staff participating and the results of the drill.

Fire Response Plan

■ **Have a fire emergency plan.**

It is important for your public assembly to have a written fire emergency plan that incorporates prevention of fire hazards, quick response to fire emergencies and orderly evacuation of guests. The key to a successful evacuation in a public assembly is to create an effective emergency team.

■ **Assign staff responsibilities.**

Once the plan is developed, assign specific roles to different staff members to ensure the plan is carried out during building emergencies. Potential responsibilities for staff members are outlined in these sample job descriptions.

Building Fire Marshal

- Responsible for organizing the emergency evacuation plan.
- Conduct regular inspections to prevent and remove any fire dangers.
- Initiate any building repairs and schedule testing, if required, of building systems.

Emergency Coordinator

- Train and organize staff in preparation of an emergency.
- Conduct fire drills to provide staff the opportunity to test the emergency procedures.
- Act as liaison between fire department personnel and building occupants to report missing persons and status of evacuation.

Evacuation Monitor(s)

- Initiate and assist with guest evacuation.
- Sweep through bathrooms and other secluded areas that guests may be using.
- Direct guests away from elevators and toward emergency exits.
- Report to Emergency Coordinator once evacuated.

■ Disabled Guests

Many disabled persons do not use obvious aids and are not visibly restricted. However they may have difficulty evacuating safely by themselves. Building staff should call out, "Who needs help?" Staff should also be alert for guests who are unable to respond due to a hearing impairment. Visually impaired guests may be able to evacuate on their own. However, if there is debris on the floor they may need assistance.

Guests with mobility impairments will need help relocating to a safe area or evacuating the building. In these situations a staff member should assist and remain with the individual until help arrives to complete the evacuation. Only under extreme conditions should a guest be separated from their wheelchair for evacuation down stairs.

When a fire happens...

■ Treat every alarm as an emergency.

It is imperative that every alarm is treated as though it is a real emergency, even if the initial source is unknown. If the alarm sounds, or a fire is suspected, call the Fire Department and begin evacuating guests immediately. Guests will attempt to leave the building the same way they entered. Emergency exits will have to be pointed out to guests. All employees should assist guests out of the building via the nearest emergency exit. During an emergency, exits can be propped open to assist with guest evacuation.

■ Evacuation.

Staff and guests should proceed to the designated reassembly area outside the building. It will be important for staff to be prepared to assist guests to remain calm while they relocate friends and family members.

■ Do not use elevators.

Elevators should never be used by building occupants during a fire emergency. The reason is three fold: 1) elevators may fail during a fire, trapping occupants; 2) elevator shafts may fill with smoke; and 3) the elevator needs to be available for the use of arriving firefighters. Occupants must exit by way of stairwells only.

■ Remember your emergency number -- 9•1•1.

It's important for staff calling 911 to be able to give the following information: nature of the emergency, building address, and any specifics known. The caller should be prepared to describe the emergency and report on the status of the evacuation. The caller should not hang up until told to do so by the emergency operator.

■ Fire extinguishers

If building staff are trained and able they can attempt to extinguish the fire with a portable fire extinguisher. It is important that if employees choose to use a portable extinguisher that they notify a co-worker of their intentions.

Fire Code requirements specify the size, number and location of fire extinguishers within your facility. These requirements help establish a protection level appropriate for the hazard class of your building. Make sure you know the types, sizes and maintenance requirements of your extinguishers, as well as the basics of extinguisher operation.

■ False Alarms.

After calling the Fire Department, if you determine that there is no fire, but rather a malfunction of your equipment or a false alarm, call 911 and relay this information. **Never wait to investigate the situation before notifying the Fire Department. Any delay will allow a fire to grow and further endanger the building occupants and property.**

DO NOT *silence* the alarm until given permission to do so by Fire Department personnel or by the emergency operator. DO NOT *reset* the alarm until the Fire Department arrives and has investigated the source of the alarm. All fire alarms are to be investigated by the Fire Department.

Lesson Outline

■ Review your facility's Emergency Response Plan

Make sure all employees have access to a copy of your facility's written emergency response plan. Review the procedures as a group and make sure that they are clear to everyone.

■ **View the video: *PUBLIC ASSEMBLY FIRE SAFETY***

This film covers staff response in the event of a fire and also how to identify and respond to common fire hazards. The film is appropriate for a variety of venues. The primary focus of the video is to reinforce the idea that a quick response from staff can provide a safe and orderly evacuation of guests.

■ **Discuss what to do if a fire is discovered**

Staff should understand that their quick response is important if they discover a fire, see smoke coming from under a door, or hear the fire alarm, but don't see or smell fire. Most importantly, staff should understand the need for quick evacuation and calling 911 immediately.

■ **Discuss your building's fire and life safety systems.**

Discuss your building's fire and life safety systems. Does everyone know what and where they are, and how they work? Which of the following does your building have and what is their importance in a fire...smoke detectors, manual pull alarms, elevators, stairwells, fire doors, alarm system, sprinklers, etc.?

■ **Discuss hazards of your facility.**

Discuss hazards particular to your facility. What can you identify and what precautions should be taken? Have staff from different areas identify hazards common to their work area (kitchen, bar, security, management, etc.)

■ **Hold a fire drill.**

Have a drill within a month of your program in order for staff to practice the emergency response plan. Everyone should have the opportunity to physically run through the procedures. Studies indicate that unless adults actually practice safety behaviors, they very well may not be able to perform them correctly when the need arises.

Gradually increase the realism of your fire drill. "Hide" employees in the building to see if they are located or missed. Post a sign in one of the exits indicating it is blocked by smoke.

Evaluate every fire drill. Did everyone respond correctly and appropriately to the drill? Are there staff concerns that need to be addressed regarding the evacuation procedures? These are questions fire drills can help answer.

**Additional fire safety information is available on the Seattle Fire Department website
www.seattle.gov/fire**