

Why you should put this best practice in place now ... before your next plant shutdown.

Help take employees from evacuation preparedness ... to readiness.

“Guess we all wanted to believe it would never happen.” Having to explain a disastrous event is a horrific ordeal that plant or safety managers hope never to be confronted with—even more so when injuries are involved.

As you would expect, data collected about safety incidents reveal a large number of incidents occur during plant shutdowns, turnarounds and startup projects. That’s because they involve many non-routine procedures and can produce unusual, unexpected situations.

One way to prepare for catastrophic events that require emergency evacuation is to practice for the unexpected ... and conduct evacuation drills on a regular basis.

Emergency evacuation planning is part of any plant operation. A best practice is to hold safety meetings that specifically address emergency evacuation during a plant shutdown. It’s a good time to remind employees of policies and procedures you have in place and review the exit strategies.

Don’t just prepare for the unexpected—practice the proper response to it.

When testing your evacuation procedures prior to the plant shutdown, it’s important to hold emergency evacuation drills. While information can help prepare employees, practice can uniquely help make them ready for that “clutch” moment, should a real emergency occur. Being ready means employees have the knowledge AND have confidence in themselves and those they work with to evacuate safely.



Here are a few ideas to consider that can make evacuation drills more effective:

- Hold drills at unexpected times. Drill coordinators can decide whether or not to notify plant employees in advance of the evacuation drill. The first drill can help to make employees familiar with the shutdown changes. However, keep in mind that actual emergencies are not announced, so consider making drills unannounced, too.
- Boost drill effectiveness by adding unexpected challenges that force employees to rethink their exit strategies. The point is for them to know how to respond when there is a real emergency evacuation.
- Simulate or add signage to represent operational variances and unusual conditions that will occur during the upcoming plant shutdown. It’s important to adequately address the impact of the changes.
- Evacuation drills should include operators using multichannel communication to report the situation. During plant shutdown, the risk of operators having different understandings of the state of the process unit is greater, so communication and feedback are vital.
- As employees arrive at the designated gathering point, determine if everyone has successfully evacuated or has otherwise been accounted for.

In addition to making employees ready for an emergency, an evacuation drill has other benefits. You might identify unrecognized hazards that might worsen an emergency. You might learn some employees need more training. Ultimately, holding emergency evacuation drills can help further your company’s commitment to the safety of workers.

Holding shutdown emergency evacuation drills doesn’t just help prepare workers, it helps ready them.