

Conducting a Fire Drill

Having a culture of preparedness by conducting drills helps to save lives.

One of the most gripping stories of disaster drill planning is the story of Rick Rescorla. Rescorla safely led 2,700 Morgan Stanley employees out of the World Trade Center's South Tower on Sept. 11, 2001. As Morgan Stanley's security chief, he was one of the few who saw the vulnerability of the towers.

After surviving the 1993 terrorist attack on the Twin Towers, Rescorla was confident they would eventually be attacked again. He made Morgan Stanley employees practice orderly and swift emergency evacuation drills every three months.

Even though the exercises were conceived to respond to a terrorist attack, they would have been helpful in a fire as well. Rescorla's foresight and leadership saved lives.

PRACTICE FOR THE UNEXPECTED

We are all creatures of habit; we park in the same area and even come and go through the same entrance or exit. If you ask your employees if they know three ways to leave the building: Do they know?

Conducting regular drills for fire, evacuation is crucial to your organization and can prepare employees to exit the site safely. During emergencies, evacuation routes may be partially blocked and doors can malfunction during a power outage. On top of this, other building occupants may have plans to vacate their offices simultaneously which could create bottleneck to the flow while clearing.

Store evacuation routes and maps within the Titan HST Files section to ensure quick access for employees in the event of an emergency.

WHY FIRE DRILLS AT WORK ARE IMPORTANT

The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) reports that local fire departments responded to 1,291,500 fires in 2019 (~one fire every 24 seconds). These fires caused roughly 3,700 civilian deaths; 16,600 civilian injuries; and \$14.8 billion in site property damage.

Fire drills are not only to prepare for fires! They train employees to leave the building quickly in an emergency, active shooter, natural disaster event, or other life safety situation. Evacuation skills should be a crucial element of training for all employees.

SUGGESTED STEPS

Develop a Detailed Fire Evacuation Plan

Your safety team should make a detailed fire evacuation plan. They need to consider various scenarios as part of this work: Where might a fire start? Are certain areas of the building more likely to start fires?

- Establish roles and responsibilities for the fire evacuation team, including that of the fire warden
- Develop comprehensive fire drill procedures
- Create a communication plan (using Titan HST makes this easy)
- Plan and map evacuation routes, emergency exits, and evacuation procedures
- Know your tools such as smoke detectors, fire alarms, and fire extinguishers
- Rehearse fire drills at least twice per year

CONDUCT A FIRE DRILL & REPEAT REGULARLY

Step #1: Ensure everyone is on board

- 1st: Ensure the entire fire team (from the warden on down) is trained on the evacuation procedures and ready to make the drill a success
- 2nd: Gain executive buy-in since the exercise will take people away from their workday
- 3rd: Perhaps most importantly, communicate the importance of the drill to all employees to understand the importance of the fire drill and ensure it's taken seriously

Step #2: Communicate your plan

Schedule the fire drill on the company calendar. Send a reminder to your safety team including their roles and expectations via Titan HST's Scheduled Broadcast Message feature!

Step #3: Set goals for your fire drill

Your fire team will want to set goals and standards for the drill. If you include these in your first drill, you can try to improve them in subsequent exercises. For instance, if your first drill takes 15 minutes to get everyone safely outside because you discover people are visiting the restroom or wrapping up calls, you have work to do.

Some metrics to measure:

- Time from drill activation to evacuation
- Time to report completion of the drill
- A successful shutdown of equipment (where appropriate)

Step #4: Execute the fire drill

Conduct a full rehearsal with as many employees as possible. Large companies may favor doing this by building or section to prevent full-day disruptions.

Once your employees have mastered a basic fire drill, your safety team should design more intricate scenarios. Change up variables within the exercise to train employees to react when disaster strikes. For example, you can simulate a more realistic environment by adding obstacles such as closed stairwells, broken elevators, and blocked exits.

Fire drills are not successful until every team member is accounted for outside the building at your reunification. The reunification or rally point should be a pre-designated location strategically placed outside the building. For larger organizations headquartered in multi-story buildings or large campuses, multiple rally points should be created for maximum efficiency with a separate safety team leader at each location.

Use Titan HST's Safety Status feature allows you to confirm once everyone has reached the rally point.

- [Click here](#) for a tutorial on sending a Titan HST Safety Status Request
- [Click here](#) for a tutorial on responding to a Titan HST Safety Status Request

Step #5: Appoint observers

Look for things during the execution of your drill such as the following:

- Large groups are moving slowly or talking with each other
- People on cell phones or using different mobile devices
- Unhelpful behavior such as grabbing coats, purses, and bags
- Difficulties for people with disabilities such as hard-to-open doors or slippery stairs
- Employees who choose a different exit rather than the one closest to their workstation

Dive deeper into observations such as:

- Did employees close the doors upon exiting rooms?
- What was the overall response attitude of your employees?
- Did everyone meet at their assigned meeting spot?
- If applicable, were the fire alarms reset and the alarm company notified of the drill?
- Did the building facilities (doors, alarms, automated voice commands) work as designed?

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS TO IMPROVE FIRE SAFETY

Here are some other things to consider as you plan for your fire drill at work:

- As new employees are onboarded, their new manager could handle a simple walkthrough of their evacuation route.
- Conduct drills at random times to simulate a real-world scenario and improve overall preparedness.
- Companies with extensive chemicals and equipment should ideally conduct fire drills every three months. For most everyone else, twice per year is adequate.
- If a critical safety team leader leaves the company, replace them immediately and do a leaders-only fire drill walkthrough.

Fire drills are serious events. Everyone should be confident that all colleagues have the knowledge necessary to exit the building safely in the event of emergency.

[Click here](#) to view Titan HST *Tips for Drill Efficiency!*

RESOURCES

<https://ehsdailyadvisor.blr.com/2010/09/fire-drills-why-when-and-how/>

<https://www.nfpa.org/News-and-Research/Data-research-and-tools/Building-and-Life-Safety/US-Structure-in-Office-Properties>

<https://vanguard-fire.com/six-steps-to-develop-an-effective-fire-evacuation-plan/>

<https://smallbusiness.chron.com/conduct-fire-drill-work-10444.html>