

WEEKLY SAFETY TIP - 11/30/09 – DON'T GET CAUGHT IN THE DARK

One of our SCM team members got caught in a large department store during a power failure. It went totally dark. It took several minutes before the emergency lights came on, and more time before the power was restored. Children cried, and adults started to get frightened. No one knew where to turn. It was a dangerous situation – someone could have gotten hurt. Thankfully, no one was injured during the emergency.

But what if that happened at work? Is your worksite prepared for a power failure? How do you know if your emergency lighting works? Did you push a button, and test it? If you did inspect your emergency lighting, that's good, but not enough to meet requirements.

In 29 CFR 1910.34(c)(2), OSHA defines emergency lighting as “a light source that is illuminated by a self-contained power source (e.g., tritium) and that operates independently from external power sources.” See the full regulation through this link: (http://www.osha.gov/pls/oshaweb/owadisp.show_document?p_table=STANDARDS&p_id=12886)

Then, in 1910.35, OSHA tells us that to be compliant with their requirements, you need to follow the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 101 Life Safety Code. Section 7.9.3 of that code describes the Periodic Testing of Emergency Lighting Equipment. Specifically, you are to:

- Perform functional testing monthly for not less than 30 seconds. To meet this requirement, you have to disconnect or shut off power to the location of the emergency light(s) and monitor it for 30 seconds to make sure the emergency light comes on and stays on. Or you can use a battery or computerized test system, but you still have to test it monthly for 30 seconds.
- Perform functional testing annually for not less than 90 minutes. Again, this requires shutting off power (or using a battery powered or computerized system) and monitoring it for 90 minutes. This might be a little more challenging, as it might affect the work in that area. Often companies will do this testing during slow or non-work times like weekends or off-shift.
- Keep written records that you have performed your emergency lighting inspection tests. Remember, according to OSHA or any agency, if you don't have the proper documentation, they don't know and/or you can't prove an inspection happened.

If you have questions, or would like to see a copy of the NFPA life safety code, there are two options. Contact us for more information, or you can purchase a copy of the NFPA 101 through this link:

http://www.nfpa.org/amplify/nfpa101/index.asp?order_src=A383&CMP=KNC-A383&HBX_PK=life+safety+code&HBX_OU=50&gclid=CMayouSds54CFR4HagodRS_7mA

Don't get caught in the dark. Perform your emergency lighting inspections and make sure your lights go on when the power goes off.