

Do Your Employee Emergency Contacts Need Updating?



Question: An issue recently arose when we had to call one of our employee's emergency contacts. The employee had suffered a minor medical mishap and her supervisor called and notified her emergency contact person. She was very upset that we disclosed information about her medical condition although we did not say anything specific. Apparently she and her emergency contact are no longer on good terms. How can we better manage our emergency contact procedures to avoid future problems?

Planning and Preparations Ease The Stress of Emergencies

Emergencies are stressful moments. In these cases it is not uncommon for people without medical training to overreact. Perhaps your staff was too quick to call or disclose medical information. However, remind your employee that, in this case, the intention was to watch out for her best interests. Take this as an opportunity to review your own policies and procedures related to emergencies and emergency contact notification.

Emergency Contact Policy

There are a myriad of reasons why it is a smart business practice to ensure you have up-to-date emergency contact information from your employees. As part of your emergency planning procedures, you need to have a way to contact people who can provide important information. Most employees will not experience an emergency at work, but when it happens, it can make a difference if all employees are aware of the emergency planning and response steps.

If you have not done so already, create an emergency contact form, policy and procedures that are part of your basic operations. Consider offering your employees training in both physical and mental health first aid, as well as training on your organization's policies and procedures for response and notification.

Gather the Information You Need

Emergency contact names are often gathered from employees during the first week of employment. It is certainly possible that over time the emergency contact information will change. Your policy should include a plan to actively request updates to the emergency contact information every 6 months.

Your emergency contact forms should include:

1. Employee name
 - Job title and department (employee number if relevant), supervisor's name
 - Personal contact information, such address, home phone number, and mobile number
 - Family contact information, if applicable
2. One or two emergency contact names
 - Telephone number(s) and other contact information, such as email address
 - Name and place of business and business contact information
 - The relationship between the employee and the emergency contact (i.e. spouse, parent, friend, neighbour).
3. Names and contact information for a family or treating physician
4. Optional boxes for notification of medical condition and medication, contact lenses wear, pacemaker, or other medical devices. This need not include specific details of any medical conditions, but include a box that indicates if there is a medical condition of which medical personnel should be aware.
5. Consider including a question about any allergies, including allergies to medications.
6. Include a statement granting permission to contact the emergency contact person or to provide contact information to medical or emergency personnel

Not all employees will want to disclose personal medical information. However, in the event of an emergency, this information can be vital. Ask your employees to provide you with the ability to gather this information quickly. This information could be gathered and kept in a sealed or confidential file that cannot be opened unless there is an emergency.

Emergency Contact Policy and Procedures

Include the following as part of your policy:

- A statement that says it is an employee's responsibility to provide updated emergency contact information when changes occur.
- Rules of contact and disclosure.
- Include a statement indicating that the employee understands the purpose of the information:
'By signing this form, the employee grants permission to the employer to contact the person designated as an emergency contact and/or to provide this information to emergency/medical personnel in the case of an emergency. Permission is also granted to provide relevant and necessary information about the emergency situation to the emergency contact person, if necessary.'
- Medically sensitive information will only be provided to relevant staff or emergency medical personnel in the event of an emergency and shall not be kept on file without the employee's permission.

The advantage of having a comprehensive emergency contact and emergency medical information form is that it enables you to keep the information in one place when you are trying to access it quickly in the middle of an emergency. As long as you ensure strict confidentiality and privacy of information, you should be able to gather and maintain this important and useful information.