

The Principles of Wayfinding in a Severe Weather Emergency

IS YOUR FACILITY READY FOR A SEVERE WEATHER EMERGENCY?



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Putting the Principles of Wayfinding into Action

The United States averages 1,000 tornadoes and three major hurricanes a year, putting millions of companies at risk of suffering a severe weather emergency. For employers, a severe weather situation may just be the start of an emergency for their business. In addition to the risk of thousands of dollars in fines and raised insurance premiums that could come with being unprepared for a severe weather emergency, companies face human risks as well. Worker endangerment, injury and death could have a much larger impact on a company's ability to do business. A lawsuit or OSHA violation won't just impact an employer's budget – either could impact their professional reputation as well. Companies can manage risk by starting their severe weather management **before** an emergency happens.

The Importance of Wayfinding

Wayfinding, the process of orienting and navigating through a physical space, is where a company's severe weather emergency plan should start and end. Providing consistent, organized instruction to employees on what to do, where to go, and how to get to a safe area could be the difference between effectively managing

a severe weather crisis and suffering the costs of an injured worker or OSHA citation.

The principles of wayfinding create an effective outline for implementing an effective severe weather emergency plan that keeps employees safe from danger and companies away from liability, lawsuits, and violations.

THE BASIC PRINCIPLES OF WAYFINDING

1. *Orientation*
2. *Route decision*
3. *Route monitoring*
4. *Destination recognition*

1. Orientation

Severe weather emergencies are unexpected, striking when workers could be at any location inside or outside of a facility. A workplace with effective orientation measures provides employees a means for determining where they are in relation to where they need to go to seek shelter.



Visual cues as simple as “Emergency Exit” signs and “Disaster Information Centers” are valuable wayfinding milestones during severe weather emergencies. OSHA requires “Exit” signs be visible with plainly legible lettering. Proper sign visibility, which can be enhanced by illumination, gives workers the orientation assistance necessary to make the right navigational decisions when severe weather hits. Similarly, “Disaster Information Centers,” which should be readily available at any location inside a facility, are essential orientation tools. The faster employees access their facility’s severe weather response protocols, the quicker they will be able to manage the emergency, which reduces the risk of being injured, lost or trapped inside the workplace.

2. Route Decision

Effective orientation enables employees to determine where they need to go during a severe weather situation, and route decision solutions inform safe choices in getting there. Inside their facility, employers can take ownership over that decision-making process. To do this, companies should always place customized facility maps near decision points like doorways or hallway intersections. Using visible, glow-in-the-dark map holders and mounts, employers can call attention to their route decision tools, creating an efficient wayfinding process for any person, no matter how unfamiliar they are with the facility.

While there is no way for employers to control how their workers will react to a severe weather emergency, they can provide tools to help employees make the safest possible decisions. Beyond assisting their employees with emergency management and evacuation, route decision solutions like maps and floor plans also assist in maintaining employers’ compliance with industry standards.

¹OSHA’s Interactive Floor Plan Example – OSHA.gov

OSHA’S BEST-PRACTICES FOR FLOOR PLANS¹

Designate Primary & Secondary Exits

- *These should be remote from each other to avoid any possibility that they both may be blocked.*

No Emergency Exits in Restrooms

- *Restrooms and windows should never be designated as emergency exits.*

Exit Away from Rooms with Hazardous Materials

- *Exiting away from hazards ensures employees have no contact with harmful material.*

No Emergency Exits into Narrow Passages

- *No exits should lead to passages that are too narrow to be safe.*

Exit Signs Indicating the Nearest Emergency Exit

- *“Exit” signs must be placed in every location where the direction of travel to reach the nearest exit is not immediately apparent.*

Designate an Assembly Area

- *An assembly point should be clearly designated outside the building.*

No Use of Elevators to Reach an Emergency Exit

- *The floor plan should highlight stairways as the appropriate means of evacuation.*

Indicate Exits with Wheelchair Access

- *Where applicable, exits with wheelchair access should be designated on the floorplan.*

Indicate the Employee’s Current Location

- *The floor plan should indicate the employee’s current location in the building.*

3. Route Monitoring

Managing a severe weather emergency is an active process for employees. Industry regulations and worker safety require companies to have active route monitoring solutions.

To maximize evacuation efficiency and minimize risk during a weather emergency, route monitoring tools inform safe navigation while a worker is evacuating. High-visibility tapes, floor markers, and glow-in-the-dark signs are route wayfinding tools that serve two purposes inside a facility. First, they serve as a visible guide to lead workers to safe assembly points even in the event of crowding or power outages. Secondly, route monitoring solutions help employers maintain safe, compliant exit routes.

AS AN INDUSTRY RULE, EXIT ROUTES SHOULD BE:

- Free of explosive or highly flammable furnishings
- Directed away from hazards
- Unobstructed by equipment, locked doors and dead-ends
- Equipped with directional indicators

Using high-quality, reliable route monitoring solutions is one more way companies can proactively manage severe weather emergencies and mitigate risks to worker safety and industry compliance.

4. Destination Recognition

A muster point is the destination for any effective wayfinding system during a severe weather emergency. Companies are required to have a predetermined safe area – typically outside – that all employees are aware of. While all buildings must have a single muster point, large facilities with multiple access points and many workers may have multiple muster points to prevent crowding during evacuation. Regardless of the location or number of muster points around a facility, all must be designated with the proper signage. A sign with four arrows pointing to a group in the middle is the accepted labeling for a muster point.

The success of an emergency wayfinding system depends on having an effective muster point. Areas that are easily accessible, large enough to hold a number of people, and away from hazards make ideal muster points. They also must be readily identifiable. By properly designating muster points before implementing a severe weather emergency plan, employers increase their chances of managing an emergency situation without risking the costs of being held liable for an employee injury or safety violation.

Putting the Principles of Wayfinding Into Action

Severe weather is unexpected and uncontrollable. However, inside the workplace, employers can take control of the way emergency situations are managed. Equipping facilities with high-quality wayfinding solutions that show employees where they are, where they need to go, and how to get there helps mitigate the human and business risks involved with severe weather emergency management.



Accuform enables companies to put an effective severe weather emergency plan into action with high-quality, custom wayfinding solutions for any facility. Visit www.Accuform.com/EVACUATE or call 1-800-237-1001 to manage severe weather emergencies before they start.

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