

§ 1926.159 - Employer alarm systems.

(a) "Scope and application."

(a)(1) This section applies to all emergency employee alarms installed to meet a particular OSHA standard. This section does not apply to those discharge or supervisory alarms required on various fixed extinguishing systems or to supervisory alarms on fire suppression, alarm or detection systems unless they are intended to be employee alarm systems.

(a)(2) The requirements in this section that pertain to maintenance, testing and inspection shall apply to all local fire alarm signaling systems used for alerting employees regardless of the other functions of the system.

(a)(3) All pre-discharge employee alarms installed to meet a particular OSHA standard shall meet the requirements of paragraphs (b)(1) through (4), (c), and (d)(1) of this section.

(b) "General requirements."

(b)(1) The employee alarm system shall provide warning for necessary emergency action as called for in the emergency action plan, or for reaction time for safe escape of employees from the workplace or the immediate work area, or both.

(b)(2) The employee alarm shall be capable of being perceived above ambient noise or light levels by all employees in the affected portions of the workplace. Tactile devices may be used to alert those employees who would not otherwise be able to recognize the audible or visual alarm.

(b)(3) The employee alarm shall be distinctive and recognizable as a signal to evacuate the work area or to perform actions designated under the emergency action plan.

(b)(4) The employer shall explain to each employee the preferred means of reporting emergencies, such as manual pull box alarms, public address systems, radio or telephones. The employer shall post emergency telephone numbers near telephones, or employee notice boards, and other conspicuous locations when telephones serve as a means of reporting emergencies. Where a communication system also serves as the employee alarm system, all emergency messages shall have priority over all non-emergency messages.

(b)(5) The employer shall establish procedures for sounding emergency alarms in the workplace. For those employers with 10 or fewer employees in a particular workplace, direct voice communication is an acceptable procedure for sounding the alarm provided all employees can hear the alarm. Such workplaces need not have a back-up system.

(c) "Installation and restoration."

(c)(1) The employer shall assure that all devices, components, combinations of devices or systems constructed and installed to comply with this standard are approved. Steam whistles, air horns, strobe lights or similar lighting devices, or tactile devices meeting the requirements of this section are considered to meet this requirement for approval.

(c)(2) The employer shall assure that all employee alarm systems are restored to normal operating condition as promptly as possible after each test or alarm. Spare alarm devices and components subject to wear or destruction

shall be available in sufficient quantities and locations for prompt restoration of the system.

(d) "Maintenance and testing."

(d)(1) The employer shall assure that all employee alarm systems are maintained in operating condition except when undergoing repairs or maintenance.

(d)(2) The employer shall assure that a test of the reliability and adequacy of non-supervised employee alarm systems is made every two months. A different actuation device shall be used in each test of a multi-actuation device system so that no individual device is used for two consecutive tests.

(d)(3) The employer shall maintain or replace power supplies as often as is necessary to assure a fully operational condition. Back-up means of alarm, such as employee runners or telephones, shall be provided when systems are out of service.

(d)(4) The employer shall assure that employee alarm circuitry installed after January 1, 1981, which is capable of being supervised is supervised and that it will provide positive notification to assigned personnel whenever a deficiency exists in the system. The employer shall assure that all supervised employee alarm systems are tested at least annually for reliability and adequacy.

(d)(5) The employer shall assure that the servicing, maintenance and testing of employee alarms are done by persons trained in the designed operation and functions necessary for reliable and safe operation of the system.

(e) "Manual operation." The employer shall assure that manually operated actuation devices for use in conjunction with employee alarms are unobstructed, conspicuous and readily accessible.

[58 FR 35172; June 30, 1993; 61 FR 31427, June 20, 1996]