

OPPOSITE ALARMS

This is an interesting exercise that enlightens the participants about some unusual aspects of safety that they may not be familiar with. The exercise involves playing two CDs to the participants of different alarms and asking them how they would respond if they heard these alarms.

WHEN TO USE THIS EXERCISE

This exercise can be used at any safety induction, training course or safety meeting. It is best used when you want to make people aware of some of the different conventions that are used in industry and how this may relate to different safety situations in your workplace.

DURATION

Allow 5 to 10 minutes.

MATERIALS REQUIRED

An audio player e.g. CD player, mp3, etc.

An audio recording of an alarm.

The preparation for this exercise requires you obtaining or making up two audio recordings.

1. The first one is of an alarm that sounds like a clock e.g. Big Ben in England, going bong, bong, bong..., at intervals of 7 or 8 seconds apart.
2. The second recording is of absolute silence. Make each recording about one minute long.

HOW TO RUN THIS EXERCISE

STEP 1 Tell the participants you are going to play the sounds of two different alarms which come from a nuclear facility in Europe. (The actual nuclear facility shall remain nameless.) What you want them to do is tell you what they would do if they heard these alarms while they were on the nuclear site.

STEP 2 Play the first alarm.

Get responses from the participants - what would they do if they heard this?

Play the second alarm.

Get responses from the participants - what would they do if they heard this.

STEP 3 Tell the participants what each alarm means. This first alarm (bong, bong...) that you heard is a simulation of an alarm that means everything is okay and safe at the nuclear facility.

The second alarm (absolute silence) means that there is an emergency and everyone must go to the emergency evacuation points.

STEP 4 Inform the participants of the reason why the alarm works this way. For example, when you can hear the alarm it means the power is on and the electrical supply is okay. (This is important in a nuclear reactor because you need power to pump water into the reactor to keep the core cool and prevent a meltdown.)

The second alarm, which was silent, means that the power supply has been interrupted and this has caused a critical safety alert on the site.

This is what's known as a fail-safe alarm - when the power is cut the bong, chime, etc. (alarm) stops and that is the alarm.

STEP 5 Conduct the group discussion.

GUIDANCE NOTES FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

Examples of discussion questions include:

- Do you understand the logic of this alarm and why it is set up this way?
- Do you think this could cause problems in the workplace if the alarm was activated (no alarm)? How long do you think it would take for people to notice?
- Have you ever been in a situation where someone (e.g. the next door neighbour) is making some noise (e.g. mowing the lawn) and it is annoying you? When the noise stops do you notice it straight away or does it dawn on you a while after.
- What implications are there when we break with traditional safety conventions in the workplace e.g. the alarm is no alarm?
- Have you come across any alarms, safety practices or items that do not follow traditional safety conventions? Examples may include left hand threads on Liquid Petroleum Gas cylinders, colour coding of electrical wires, etc.
- Are there risks associated with these alarms, safety practices or items? If so, what are they?

ATTACHMENTS

None.