



Know When to Pull the Trigger to Activate an Emergency Response Assistance Plan

Patrick Knight Manager, Safety & Quality Assurance

ONE THING IS CLEAR —when some are faced with potential disaster: They are hesitant to pull the trigger to activate their emergency response plan.

People have a connection to the incident and normally think, ‘this has never happened to me before,’ and want to fix the situation as quickly as possible, and as cost-effectively as possible, not realizing they are in a critical situation. But they may not always be thinking clearly because they are emotionally and financially attached to the incident. They want to get down there, get that truck upright, and get it done quickly.

Plan Participants will now hear four questions when they call into ERAC’s 24-hour Call Center because they’ve had an incident involving dangerous goods:

1. Has the integrity of the Means of Containment been compromised?
2. Is a transfer anticipated or required?
3. Is there a release or an anticipated release?
4. Did the First Responders, Authority Having Jurisdiction, or Carrier ask for help?



If the answer is ‘YES’ to any one of these questions, ERAC will highly recommend ERAP activation.

ERAC re-examined their activation and mobilization process after a recent incident occurred in early January involving a LPG tank truck rollover. Believing they could handle the situation themselves, the Plan Participant turned down my offer to have a Remedial Measures Advisor and team mobilize to site, advising they had their own equipment and responders.

However, once Transport Canada became aware of the response details, they directed the Plan Participant to activate their plan. With the delay in response, the ERAC team was activated about six hours after the incident, the situation taking longer to be contained and remediated than if the plan had been immediately activated. From the time the incident occurred till the end, the highway was closed for approximately 30 hours— no traffic moving in either direction.

We were finding that Plan Participants were not fully understanding their responsibilities when faced with an incident – should or shouldn’t they activate their plan? The four questions we’ve recently implemented into our initial assessment now make it very clear: If you have a transportation emergency where you answer “YES” to any one of the four questions, we will highly recommend plan activation.

Following the plan and utilizing ERAC’s highly trained and equipped response personnel will provide a timely and effective response and avoid unnecessary delays – and a potentially worse situation. It could also reduce liability and protect the Plan Participant from possible regulatory fines.

From my experience, trucking companies that do not hesitate to call and activate their ERAP immediately after an incident, tell me our emergency response team took all the stress off them, enabling them to look after day-to-day business. The crisis management team could focus on getting their shipments on time and move trucks to meet the company’s obligations. All the emergency response operations were left to us, relieving them from a lot of pressure. And they thanked us for that.

The new four key questions will provide a clear, effective, and consistent approach to quickly determine if an ERAP should be activated. They will help take the stress off Plan Participants in knowing when to pull the trigger. When Plan Participants follow the plan, they get highly-trained personnel to get the job done quickly and safely. It’s all about plan activation.

If you are an ERAC member and have questions regarding your ERAP, please visit www.ERAC.org and complete the on-line Plan Participant Readiness and Review Program or contact Patrick Knight at patrick.knight@erac.org