Fire Safety

Businesses are vulnerable to a number of threats, both to their people and to their ability to maintain business continuity. From violent weather and natural disasters to power outages and acts of violence, an organization must deal with the pressure of preparing for the unexpected and protecting its people.

When it comes to a workplace fire incident, there are few scenarios more frightening. Fires are unpredictable, life-threatening, costly, and difficult to recover from. A major fire in the workplace can disrupt operations for weeks, months, or permanently. Protecting your business from the threat of fires begins with prevention. While some situations are out of a company’s control (i.e. wildfires or arson), most workplace fires can be avoided with a few extra precautions.

Assessing how your building, facility, or site is at risk for fire is the first step in understanding how to avoid a fire and mitigate the impact if one does occur. Designating certain employees to handle fire safety will help with comprehensive oversight of your organization’s preparedness. Having an evacuation plan with an wall mounted escape plan for each room and area can save lives.

When developing your fire safety and prevention plan, the following should be included:

* Clearly articulate all major fire hazards
* Instruct employees how to properly handle and store hazardous materials
* Educate employees on potential ignition sources and their control
* Communicate what fire protection equipment is in place to handle each major hazard
* Communicate evacuation protocol and how to use your company’s emergency notification system
* Include procedures to control accumulation of flammable and combustible waste materials
* Include safeguards installed on heat-producing equipment to prevent the accidental ignition of combustible materials
* Develop a list that contains the names/job titles of internal fire safety officer

Every business should find at least one person to serve as their Fire Safety Officer. Logical candidates include your company’s Office Manager, Facility Manager, Safety Officer, Compliance Officer, or Human Resources Manager.

Fire Safety Officer tasks can include:

* Assist in implementing and improving effective emergency procedures in your workplace
* Conduct a thorough walkthrough of your company’s workspace to assess fire hazards
* Raise awareness (with both leadership and staff) about existing fire hazards
* Document risk areas and work with leadership to resolve them
* Help prevent emergencies by evaluating fire risk control measures
* Educate employees on how to respond to an emergency
* Plan and execute regular fire drills
* Continue with routine fire prevention walkthroughs
* Maintaining accountability of individuals and reporting to leadership
* Ensuring doors are closed and evacuation routes are clear
* Assisting mobility-impaired staff
* Ensuring affected areas are clear and collecting stragglers
* Test and maintain smoke alarms
* Coordinate with the Fire Department to test the fire alarm system.

Types of Fires:

* **Class A** – Ordinary combustible materials, wood, paper, etc. Treat with water (cooling) or dry chemicals (coating).
* **Class B** – Flammable liquids, gases, and greases. Treat by excluding air with carbon dioxide, etc. Respirators may be required if the firefighters’ fresh air supply is threatened.
* **Class C** – Electrical fires. Treat with nonconductive extinguishing agent.
* **Class D** – Combustible and reactive metals such as magnesium. Treat with non-reactive heat-absorbing extinguishing medium.

Each type of fire uses an associated type of fire extinguisher.

When responding to a fire there are two major procedures that have become standard. The first is PASS:

* P – **Pull** the pin on the fire extinguisher
* A – **Aim** the nozzle at the base of the fire
* S – **Squeeze** the trigger
* S – **Sweep** the nozzle back and forth at the base of the fire until extinguished

The second is RACE:

* R – **Rescue** any patrons or staff not in immediate danger
* A – **Alarm** should then be pulled to alert others and the fire department
* C – **Confine** the fire as best you can
* E – **Evacuate** yourself and others if the fire is large, if the fire is small and contained you can **Extinguish** the fire using **PASS**.

Al employees should be educated and trained on fire safety and the company fire emergency plan. This should be done at new employee orientation, at annual refresher trainings, and including in the employee handbook. Fire safety should be everyone’s responsibility. The culture of fire safety starts with you.