

Title:

Fire Safety in the Workplace

Word Count:

968

Summary:

To protect yourself, your workers and your business from a fire, you must have a plan. First, you need a plan to help prevent a fire emergency from happening in the first place. But since even the best prevention plan isn't fool proof you must have a plan to protect personnel and minimize damage to property in the event of a fire.

Keywords:

fire safety, industrial fire safety equipment, smoke detector, fire extinguisher, fire truck, ambulance

Article Body:

The lights flicker. There is a growing smell of something burning and suddenly your work space is plunged into darkness. Acrid smoke begins to sting your eyes and interfere with your breathing. Your first thoughts are of fire!

Suddenly your mind is flooded with questions like, "Where is the smoke coming from? What's burning? Where is the fire? How fast will it spread? Is help on the way? What should I do? Should I call someone? Is there a fire alarm anywhere nearby? Should I try to evacuate? What's the safest escape route?" When you left for work this morning you didn't expect anything like this. Now you're asking what could be life or death questions and you aren't coming up with answers.

No one ever expects an emergency - especially one that happens to them. But the reality is that an emergency like fire can happen to anyone at anytime. You and your employees and coworkers could be called upon to answer questions like those listed above when you least expect it.

To protect yourself, your workers and your business, you must have a plan. First, you need a plan to help prevent a fire emergency from happening in the first place. But since even the best prevention plan isn't fool proof you *must* have a plan to protect personnel and minimize damage to property in the event of a fire.

Preparing an Action Plan

An effective action plan begins with brainstorming worst-case scenarios. Assemble a team of managers and key employees to identify the areas where a fire would cause the most damage, present the greatest danger to personnel, spread most rapidly or be most likely to start in the first place. Your plan should be specifically tailored to your workplace. To ensure maximum safety in an emergency, it may be necessary to develop separate plans for different areas or departments. Some areas may be more vulnerable to fire potential or be less accessible by emergency workers.

The fire emergency action plan developed by your team should cover actions that must be taken by the employer, managers and employees to ensure personal safety and include information about all potential sources for fire risk. It will be important to complete a comprehensive hazard assessment to determine what environmental conditions, chemicals or flammable liquids in your workplace may create areas of potential risk.

What an Action Plan Must Include

- Method for reporting a fire
- Evacuation plan and procedures
- Escape procedures and route assignments - strategically placed maps of floor plans with clearly marked escape routes, safe areas and post-evacuation meeting areas.
- List of names, titles, departments and telephone numbers of people within your business or department. This list should also include emergency contact information for all listed personnel.
- List describing and explaining the duties and responsibilities of key personnel during a fire emergency
- Procedures for employees who perform or shut down critical operations before evacuating, operate fire extinguishers or other emergency equipment.
- Rescue and medical duties key workers are designated to perform

Alerting Employees

Your action plan must address how employees will be alerted in an emergency and how to report emergencies. This alert and evacuation plan must also take into consideration alerting and evacuating disabled workers.

- Alarms must be distinctive and recognized by all employees as a signal to evacuate or perform emergency procedures as specified by the action plan.
- Make emergency communications systems like a public address system, portable radio units and other tools of communication for notifying employees available and easily accessible.

- Designate key personnel as having the responsibility to contact the fire department and local law enforcement.

- Alarms must be able to be heard and seen by all employees. Consider installing an auxiliary power supply in the event there is a power failure.

Evacuation Plan and Procedures

In the event an emergency evacuation is necessary, a disorganized evacuation in the absence of a plan can result in undue risk to employees and may result in confusion and injury. A carefully developed action plan must spell out the following:

- Conditions under which an evacuation is necessary

- Clear chain of command designating who is authorized to order an evacuation, evacuation coordinators and the duties for which they are responsible.

- Clear evacuation procedures including evacuation routes and emergency exits. These procedures must be posted in locations that are easily accessible to all employees. Evacuation routes must be clearly marked.

- Procedures for assisting people with disabilities or who do not speak English

- A system to account for personnel following an evacuation.

Employee Training

Employees should be trained in these areas:

- Individual roles and responsibilities

- Notification, warning and communications procedures

- Emergency response procedures

- Evacuation and accountability procedures

- Location and operation of emergency equipment including, but not limited to, fire extinguishers, fire hoses, breathing apparatus, fire doors and fire blankets

- Emergency shutdown procedures

- First aid

- Conduct regular practice drills

- Schedule annual fire safety training classes for employees and new hires

- Update procedures to reflect changes in your company and facility

Fire prevention, safety in the workplace and an effective emergency response plan is the responsibility of every employer and employee. Development of a comprehensive action plan, alarm system, evacuation plan and employee training are essential in creating a safe work environment.

For more information about fire safety in the work place check the OSHA web site at www.osha.gov or phone the OSHA Training Institute, Office of Training and Education at (847) 297-4810.