

## Toolbox Safety Topic

### Fire Safety

Admit it. It's probably happened at your facility; the fire alarm goes off and your employee's first reaction is to dismiss it as a false alarm. Unfortunately, this kind of response can lead to tragedy.

From 1993 to 1997, fires in the U.S. industrial and manufacturing workplaces caused an annual average of 16 fatalities, 631 injuries, and \$776.5 million in property damage according to a National Fire Protection Association survey. Office properties averaged one fatality, 91 injuries, and \$131.5 million in damage a year. What does this mean? It means that companies aren't spending enough time teaching employees proper fire safety procedures.

People underestimate how quickly fire can pass through a building. The only way to survive it is to be prepared to take fire and smoke alarms seriously and to have a solid plan in place. It's also good advice to get employees involved by allowing them to learn how to deliver emergency care before the fire department arrives. Employees can also help write a fire evacuation plan and teach their co-workers how to follow it - through regular fire drills.

Fire drills help teach employees what to do at the first sign of fire. They allow us to identify – on a regular basis – obstructions, such as boxes, cartons, malfunctioning doors and signs, and fire traps. People might think, "Hey, I'm here everyday, I'll know how to get out". They don't know that they won't recognize the building in a fire.

Aside from drills, training must also include information on how to react in a fire emergency. Here are some tips:

1. Identify two exits – one quick exit and an alternative exit if the primary one is blocked. Also determine a place to escape the fire's smoke and heat if there's no way out.
2. Drop to your hands and knees when you can't avoid smoke. If no exit is available, head to a refuge or compartment in the building.
3. Close off a room from smoke and heat by sealing the edges of the doors and vents with towels and/or tape (check desk drawers). Then call the fire department to report your location.
4. Make accommodations and a plan for employees with special needs.
5. Teach employees that they can follow these fire safety tips at home.

It's also a good idea to include the following information in your plan.

- Emergency escape procedures and escape route assignments. Maps of the building with escape routes identified are a good example.
- Procedures to perform prior to evacuating the area.
- Procedures to account for employees after evacuation.
- Rescue and medical duties for employees trained in first aid.
- Means for reporting fires and other emergencies.
- Names and titles of persons and/or departments to contact for more information and/or certification of duties.

Some companies are already committed to stressing fire safety. Drills will test everything that you do to protect your employees – your alarms, your doors, etc. You don't want emergency situations where no one knows where to go. Drills save lives. Inspect and maintain your fire systems. You may want to include other natural hazards, such as tornados or hurricanes in your plan. Everyone should then be informed and trained of the plan, and practice makes perfect!

**Any questions?**

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Fire Safety

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Meeting Conducted By: \_\_\_\_\_ Title: \_\_\_\_\_

## Attendees

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