

October 5, 2004

Fight Fire With Prevention

Preventing fire in the workplace can be easy; repairing the damage after a fire isn't. That's why it is important to be aware of the fire hazards in your surroundings and eliminate them before they cause serious or even fatal damage.

Here are some ways you can reduce fire hazards at work:

- Be aware of potential dangers like gas leaks, hazardous chemicals or even a pile of oily rags. Dispose of rags and chemicals in properly sealed separate containers. If you detect a suspicious smell check out the appliance or electrical equipment it could indicate burning insulation.
- Keep your work area clean. It only takes a few minutes to put trash in the trash can and other combustible materials in approved storage containers.
- Never refuel equipment powered by gasoline, kerosene or diesel fuel when the equipment is hot, or in the presence of an open flame such as a furnace or water heater.
- Only use flammable liquids in well-ventilated areas, away from any sources of ignition. Store oxygen separately from flammable liquids, oil, flammable gases and other fuels. Keep reactive materials apart.
- Follow all storage and handling precautions for using and storing flammable liquids and chemicals.
- Smoke only in designated areas.
- Keep motors in good working order to prevent them from overheating.

- Look for frayed extension cords, old wiring or worn electrical fittings. Report any unsafe conditions to your supervisor, or fix the problem if you have the proper training and are authorized to do so.
- Make sure emergency exit doors and windows are kept free of clutter and become familiar with the exit routes from your work area---at least two of them. Know the location of the nearest fire alarms and how to operate them.
- Don't block overhead sprinkler systems by stacking material too high or too near the sprinkler head.
- Know where the nearest fire extinguisher is located and be trained in how to use it. Make sure fire extinguishers are serviced regularly.
- Ask your supervisor to give your workplace a "fire safety inspection" from time to time. This will show you some of the things you may be missing in your efforts to maintain a work area free of fire-hazards.
- Know what to do if the fire alarm sounds. Know your escape route and what to do once you leave the building. Become familiar with your fire evacuation procedures.

Here are a few other things to remember if you discover a fire:

- Sound the fire alarm and warn co-workers of the fire so they can leave the area immediately.
- When evacuating your work area, make sure you leave by the stairs; do not use the elevator. Once you have made it out of the building do not return until you have been instructed by the authorities that it is safe to do so.
- Never attempt to put out a fire if you are not trained to use a fire extinguisher, especially if the fire is large or it would mean blocking your escape route.

Safety Tip: **The best way to fight a fire is to prevent it from happening in the first place. Do your part to stop fires before they start.**

