Workplace Fires Meeting Kit



WHAT'S AT STAKE

No matter the size or type of your business, the potential for workplace fires is present. The risk is likely higher in more industrial operations such as welding, but a small paper fire or electrical short can also ignite a devastating fire inside an office building.

WHAT'S THE DANGER

COMMON CAUSES OF WORKPLACE FIRES

Defective Electrical Equipment. Defective electrical equipment can present significant danger to workers and business. Imperfect/loose wiring, faulty/old equipment and overloaded sockets can cause sparks or overheating and thus fire. All electrical equipment in your workplace should be well maintained and regularly tested.

Flammable/Combustible Materials. Any premises that holds flammable materials like paper, wood and cardboard needs to make sure that they are managed appropriately. If these combustible materials are allowed to build up, they can act as fuel and help any small fire outbreak to escalate. Appropriate storage, disposal and handling processes of these materials is essential.

Smoking. You should have a dedicated smoking area at least a few metres away from your building for workers to use. Cigarettes can easily set light to nearby flammable materials like leaves, papers and other items found in rubbish bins, so it's vital that you provide a safe place to dispose of smoking materials.

Negligence & Human Error. Negligence and human error are other major causes of fire in the workplace. The risk of this can be reduced by making sure staff are fully aware of the workplace guidelines to follow. Regular refresher training should also be provided to staff to remind them of fire risks and how to mitigate them.

Faulty Fire Detection Alarms. Although fire detection alarms and systems are not a direct cause of fire, failure to frequently inspect, maintain and service them can lead to large, uncontrollable fires. By making sure your alarms are working as they should be, you can rest assured that they'll notify you in the early stages of a fire.

Cooking Equipment. Burning food, leaving cooking equipment unsupervised and the use of combustible materials present risks, so it's important the correct procedures are implemented and followed.

Untidy & Dirty Workplace. Workplaces that are untidy and clustered are much more susceptible to fires. Overloaded rubbish bins and poorly ventilated areas, assist fires to grow. Forgetting to clean equipment and letting dust build up can cause machinery to overheat.

Arson. A common cause of workplace fires is arson. Industrial and commercial businesses can be targeted if the building is often left unattended for long periods of time. Installing CCTV cameras and motion sensor lights around the property can act as a deterrent to any lurking criminals.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

BEST FIRE MEASURES TO PROTECT WORKERS AND PROPERTY

1. Good Housekeeping

- Inspect cords for breaks, frays, and ensure they're plugged firmly into the outlets.
- Don't overload power strips, surge protectors, or "daisy chain" these items together.
- Avoid storing materials in front of emergency exits or fire extinguishers.
- Keep paper products, aerosols, chemicals, and other flammable materials away from heat sources.
- Keep appliances clean and free of spilled fats, sugar, sauces, etc.
- Turn off tools or appliances if they produce a burning smell, smoke, sparks, or flickering lights.

2. Fire extinguishers. All businesses must have fire extinguishers and the right type of extinguisher.

- Class A fires include wood, paper, and textiles.
- Class B fires include flammable liquids.
- Class C fires include electrical equipment.
- Class D fires include metal powders and shavings.
- Class K fire extinguishers are required for commercial and restaurant kitchens.

Workers need to know how to use fire extinguishers properly.

If a fire extinguisher is empty, doesn't extinguish the blaze, or your employees have any doubts about fighting the fire, evacuate the workplace immediately in accordance with your emergency action plan.

3. Fire Detection Systems. A smoke alarm, heat detector, and/or flame detector provides an instant alert when fire or smoke is present. Workers can react quickly when they hear the sound whether they need to use a fire extinguisher or exit the workplace. Regularly test and maintain fire detection systems. You also need to make sure these devices are protected from corrosion or other potential damage and provide enough warning time for employees to evacuate the workplace.

4. Hazardous Chemical Storage. Many workplaces have hazardous chemicals present. These could be as simple as cleaning solutions you store at the office or large containers of hazardous materials stored in warehouses or transported on trucks or ships. In all cases, they pose a risk for potential workplace fires. When storing chemicals, make sure to keep incompatible groups apart. Check the safety data sheets and the hazard labels for further information.

5. Emergency Planning, Evacuation. Workers must have an emergency action plan (EAP) and communicate it. Part of the EAP includes procedures on how to evacuate. Getting workers out of the workplace safely is the top priority. Practice this plan throughout the year to help ensure an orderly exit in case of fire or other emergency.

FIRE SAFETY CHECKLIST FOR WORKERS

- Avoid overloading power sockets and regularly check electrical equipment to ensure it is in good condition.
- Keep all combustible and flammable materials off-site and dispose of them regularly.
- Provide workers with a dedicated smoking area and somewhere to safely dispose of smoking materials.
- Provide workers with fire safety and prevention training.
- Regularly test all fire alarms.
- Keep a clean and tidy workplace, ensuring rubbish bins aren’t overloaded.
- Install CCTV cameras and motion sensor lights around the perimeter of your building.

FINAL WORD

Every organization is vulnerable to workplace fires. Depending on the nature of your team’s work, specific structures, and industry considerations, assess your potential fire hazards and develop a fire safety plan accordingly.