

October 2003 - Fire Safety

October has been designated as Fire Safety and Prevention Month for many years. Industry, by large, has responded by utilizing this month to conduct various types fire training and placing special emphasis on fire hazards in the workplace and what to do in a fire emergency. If you haven't already, you may want to adopt October as the month you dedicate to your various needs for fire safety and prevention activities. These are some of the topics you may want to inspect, review or conduct training on this month.

Housekeeping for Fire Safety

Conduct an inspection looking for poor housekeeping practices that could result in a fire. These are some of the items you should look at during the inspection.

- Are all storage areas clean and free of debris?
- Are all flammable liquids properly stored?
- Are combustibles, like oily rags, properly stored in tightly covered metal containers?
- Are designated smoking areas established and enforced?
- Are motors and equipment free of dust and grease and in good operating condition?
- Are combustible and flammable materials (wood, paper, gas, oil, chemicals) kept away from lights, machinery, or other heat sources?
- Are the outer areas around the plant kept fire safe and weeds and vegetation cut at least 15 feet away from surrounding the property?
- Is electrical equipment properly covered and protected?
- Are electrical boxes clear for a distance of 3 feet?
- Are fire doors and exits free of obstructions and not locked when employees are inside?
- Are exit routes from buildings free of obstructions and properly marked with exit signs?
- Are fire extinguishers in their proper place and not blocked or obstructed?
- Are extension cords being used where permanent wiring should be installed?

Portable Fire Extinguishers

If you provide portable fire extinguishers for employees to use in the workplace, you must provide training in the use of the equipment and the hazards involved with incipient stage fire fighting. OSHA requires this training upon initial employment and at least annually thereafter.

The best training you can offer is outdoor fire demonstrations with hands-on, live-fire extinguisher training that may be offered by your local fire department. If inclined, contact your local fire department to see if they will conduct and supervise this type of portable fire extinguisher training for your employees.

For classroom training, there are several sources that you may want to consider. One source would be your fire extinguisher vendor or the service company that maintains your extinguishers. Another may be an employee that may work as a volunteer fire department member. Yet another source is a free "Fire Extinguisher Training" program offered by Oklahoma State University. You can access this training program at <http://www.pp.okstate.edu/ehs/MODULES/Exting/intro.htm> and download this training module as a Power-Point presentation. This training program includes:

- The Fire Triangle
- Classifications of Fuels
- Types of Fire Extinguishers
- Rules for Fighting Fires
- How to Use a Fire Extinguisher

Review Topics

The following subjects would be appropriate to review during Fire Safety and Prevention Month with all employees.

- Cover procedures for controlling workplace ignition sources such as smoking, welding, and burning.

- Review housekeeping procedures or standards for storage and cleanup of flammable materials and flammable waste.
- Review Emergency Action Plan and conduct live or table top drill.

Summary

You have been given a lot of choices in this month Safety Topic. Your best choice may be to figure a way to accomplish them all. They are all important topics that could result in preventing a fire in your workplace, minimizing or eliminating property damage should a fire occur, and avoiding any personal injuries if you did have a fire because your employees were properly trained in how to respond to a fire situation.