

5

minute safety talk



Drill Fire Safety into Your Employees

From 2000 to 2004, non-residential structure fires caused an annual average of 110 fatalities, 1,655 injuries and \$2,743,000,000 in property damage, according to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA). **What does this mean?** It means that companies aren't spending enough time teaching employees about fire safety.

Flames ignite from many sources

- **Arson:** Arson has been a leading cause of fires in general office buildings. Minimize the risk by following security procedures and keeping unauthorized people out of your building. Lock doors after business hours and keep clutter out of hallways, lobbies and other public areas.
- **Office machines:** Heat created by office machines can be hazardous. Leave adequate space for air to circulate around copy machines, computers and coffee makers. Keep appliances clear of papers or anything else that might catch fire and turn off or unplug appliances at the end of the day.
- **Smoking:** Careless smoking is another contributor to fires. Smoking should only be allowed in designated areas, and smoking materials should be disposed of carefully — not dumped in a wastebasket.
- **Electricity:** If you smell a strange odor, call your maintenance department. Replace cracked or damaged electrical cords as soon as they're discovered. Don't use extension cords. If needed, surge suppressors are acceptable.

Plan on saving lives

The best way to survive a fire is to be prepared and have an evacuation plan. Get employees involved by teaching them how to deliver emergency care before the fire department arrives. Employees also can help write a fire evacuation plan and take co-workers through regular fire drills. The evacuation plan should be reviewed by a knowledgeable fire safety person.

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

- Your first priority should be getting out of the building. Do not stay back to gather any of your belongings.
- Identify one quick exit and an alternative exit if the primary one is blocked. Also, determine a place to escape the smoke and heat if there's no way out.
- 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.
- If needed, close off a room from smoke and heat by sealing the edges of the doors and vents with towels or clothing. Then call the fire department to report your location.

- Make your local fire department aware of your company's building and its emergency routines.
- Make accommodations and a plan for employees with special needs.
- Follow these fire safety tips in your own home.

Follow OSHA's lead

OSHA requires companies with more than 10 employees to create a written fire prevention plan and communicate it in writing. Companies with fewer than 10 employees may communicate the plan orally but should have a written plan as well. Under the minimum requirements for this plan, all workplaces must provide the following, along with the identification of known fire hazards, especially in higher hazard workplaces:

- Emergency escape procedures and escape route assignments
- Procedures to perform prior to evacuation
- 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

Companies follow through

At Nabisco Inc., drills are an important part of their fire prevention plan. The plan also includes inspection and maintenance of fire systems, education for employees worldwide, and a comprehensive emergency response plan that covers fires or natural hazards like tornadoes or hurricanes. It's not just the safety personnel who must be involved, but the entire Nabisco organization.

Johnson & Johnson's plan takes a similar employee-involvement approach. Their employees act as "floor marshals" to help with evacuation — checking washrooms, knowing who's at work and who's not, and taking headcounts at designated meeting areas.

All employees need to take fire safety seriously. Know how to maintain an environment that prevents and controls fire hazards, but be prepared to evacuate if a fire occurs.