



Fire Prevention for Small Businesses

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Fire can have a devastating impact on small businesses and home-based-businesses. A fire can race through a structure/business in a matter of minutes, giving the employer and employees little time to escape. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics' data for Texas for 2008, there were 23 work-related fatalities and 60 nonfatal cases requiring days away from work reported as a result of fires or explosions. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 1910.39 requires an employer with 10 or more employees to have a fire prevention plan.

A fire prevention plan must be:

- in writing;
- kept in the workplace; and
- available for employees to review.

The following minimum elements must be included in a fire prevention plan:

- list of all major fire hazards;
- proper handling and storage procedures for hazardous materials;
- potential ignition sources and their control;
- type of fire protection equipment necessary to control each major hazard;
- procedures to control accumulations of flammable and combustible waste materials;
- procedures for regular maintenance of safeguards installed on heat-producing equipment to prevent the accidental ignition of combustible materials;
- name or job title of employees responsible for maintaining equipment to prevent or control sources of ignition or fires; and
- name or job title of employees responsible for the control of fuel source hazards.

Preventing Fires

- Avoid storing or stockpiling flammable materials such as packaging materials or waste where they could be accessed by the public, including areas immediately outside the business premises.
- Ensure all machinery is serviced as recommended by manufacturers and is kept clean.
- If possible, switch machinery off when the business is unattended.
- When the business is unattended, secure all doors, windows or other access points and make sure there is adequate lighting to deter trespassers.
- If a business stores dangerous goods, it should ensure their storage and use adheres to federal, state and local requirements.



Smoke Alarms

For small businesses based outside the home, contact the local fire department to determine the fire alarm requirements for the building. Smoke alarms or smoke detectors should be installed on every level of a building, including the basement, on ceilings or high on walls.

Smoke alarms and smoke detectors should be tested once a month, according to manufacturer's instructions. Batteries should be replaced once a year or as soon as the smoke alarm or smoke detector "chirps," indicating the battery is low. Smoke alarms should be replaced every 10 years, even those that are hard-wired, or "long life," 10-year battery-types. A qualified electrician should install hard-wired fire alarms.

Evacuation Plan

In addition to maintaining smoke alarms or smoke detectors, it is essential that businesses develop and practice a basic fire evacuation plan so employees

know what to do when an alarm sounds. Employers should involve as many people as practical in putting together the plan, including disabled employees. As part of the plan, have employees:

- study posted evacuation plans;
- learn two ways out of each work area;
- count the number of desks or work stations between their work area and the nearest two exits;
- designate an outside meeting place where everyone can gather after evacuating, and devise a system to account for everyone in the building; and
- practice the evacuation plan at least twice a year.

Fire Extinguishers

If the emergency plan includes the use of portable fire extinguishers, employers must keep in mind that a properly maintained portable fire extinguisher can quickly put out a small fire or control a larger one until the fire department arrives. However, the number one priority is that everyone must evacuate safely and call the fire department. Employees appointed to use a fire extinguisher must be properly trained in its operation before a fire breaks out. They should only operate the fire extinguisher if they have an unobstructed escape route and are comfortable handling the situation. They should begin discharging the extinguisher six to eight feet away from the fire and move closer as the fire diminishes.

To operate a fire extinguisher, a person should remember the word **PASS** while holding the extinguisher with the nozzle pointing away from them:

- **P**ull the pin;
- **A**im low, point the extinguisher at the base of the fire;
- **S**queeze the lever; and
- **S**weep the nozzle from side-to-side.

Fire Sprinkler Systems

If a property has a properly installed and maintained automatic fire sprinkler system, the chances of dying in a fire, and the average property loss per fire, are both cut by one-half to two-thirds compared to properties that don't have sprinkler systems.

Employers should ensure that a suitable, adequately serviced, and functional fire alarm system is installed (e.g.: remote serviced alarm systems, sprinkler systems, thermal or smoke alarms, etc.).

Contingency Plans

An employer should know what information is important for business continuity. They should develop contingency plans to protect and/or restore all important information (hard copy and electronic) like supplier and client lists, business contracts and insurance details. A designated off-site secure location to store important information should be included in the contingency plan.

The Texas Department of Insurance, Division of Workers' Compensation (TDI-DWC) also offers several free fire-related safety publications online at <http://www.tdi.state.tx.us/wc/safety/videosources/index.html> including: Fire Prevention Plan Sample OSHA Written Program, Fire Safety: Flammable Liquids-Take 5 for Safety, and Fire Safety Workplace Program.

TDI-DWC features a free occupational safety and health audiovisual loan library. Call 512-804-4620 for more information or visit our website at www.tdi.state.tx.us/wc/safety/videosources/avcatalog.html.

This fact sheet was published with information from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration and the Texas Department of Insurance, Division of Workers' Compensation, and is considered accurate at the time of publication.

***Remember to practice safety,
don't learn it by accident.***