



How Fireproof Is Your Workplace?

On an average day, there are more than 200 workplace fires in this country. Annually, those fires kill hundreds of workers, injure many thousands more, and cost American businesses billions of dollars in damage and lost productivity.

Unfortunately, there are dozens of ways workplace fires can start. You have to be on top of potential fire hazards all the time to make sure that your facility doesn't become part of the statistics.

8 Common Fire Hazards

A successful fire prevention program begins with identifying all potential fire hazards. Here's a list of the most common (you may have others to add to the list):

- **Scrap and trash.** When waste materials are allowed to build up, the danger of fire increases. All it takes is an ignition source to get a fire going, and then the fire has plenty of fuel on which to feed.
- **Dust.** An excess of dust or powder in the air from wood, plastic, or metal operations can, if ignited, cause an explosion. Combustible dust explosions are among the most destructive and deadly types of workplace accidents.
- **Flammable liquids.** Improper handling, storage, or disposal of flammable liquids used in production processes, as fuel sources, or for cleaning operations is a leading cause of workplace fires. And some of those fires can be deadly. For example, a few years back, a release of hydrocarbon liquid and vapor at the BP America oil refinery in Texas City, Texas, ignited. Seconds later, a powerful explosion devastated the facility, leaving 15 dead and about 100 others injured.
- **Combustible materials.** Ordinary combustibles like paper, cardboard, cloth, and wood, or products made from these materials, can create fire hazards as well. Other combustible materials, such as oily rags or other materials soaked with oil, can spontaneously combust if left carelessly lying around.
- **Electrical problems.** Overloaded circuits and outlets, damaged wiring, defective switches, and damaged plugs can all lead to dangerous electrical fires. Electric coffeemakers, fans, space heaters, and other appliances used by employees are also potential fire hazards.
- **Heat and ignition sources.** Any source of heat or ignition (such as a spark) can lead to a fire when combined with combustible or flammable materials.
- **Machinery.** Inadequately lubricated or dirty machinery can also cause fires, as can mechanical defects.
- **Smoking.** Although smoking is most likely prohibited except in designated areas, employees may ignore the rules and sneak a smoke in restrooms or some low-traffic hideaway. A smoker might toss a match or cigarette butt into a wastebasket thinking it's extinguished when, in fact, it's still burning.



Fire Safety Checklist

The next step is to enlist the help of employees in identifying and reporting fire hazards and in taking proper steps to prevent workplace fires.

Here's a checklist of essential fire safety rules from Windsor's fire prevention safety meeting that your employees should know about and follow:

- Report any fire hazards anywhere in the facility immediately.
- Use a nonflammable material instead of a flammable one, whenever possible.
- Report any flammable liquid leaks and spills immediately so that the spill can be cleaned up and the leak repaired.
- Store flammable materials only in designated locations and in approved, tightly sealed containers.
- Check container labels and material safety data sheets to make sure you don't store incompatible substances close together.
- Assume an empty container that held a flammable liquid still has flammable residue.
- Ground containers when transferring materials to prevent static electricity from igniting materials.
- Dispose of combustible waste in covered, airtight metal containers.
- Dispose of all waste materials promptly and properly.
- Keep bearings lubricated so they don't run too hot.
- Keep motors and machine tools clean and free of dust and grease that could burn.
- Keep work areas clean and free of dust and lint.
- Keep doorways and passageways clear.
- Don't block fire extinguishers or overhead sprinklers.
- Smoke only in designated areas.