



FIRE SAFETY IN THE WORKPLACE

What should employers do to protect workers from fire hazards?

Employers should train workers about fire hazards in the workplace and about what to do in a fire emergency. If you want your workers to evacuate, you should train them on how to escape. If you expect your workers to use fire-fighting equipment, you should give them appropriate equipment and train them to use the equipment safely. (See Title 29 of the Code of Federal Regulations Part 1910 Subparts E and L; and Part 1926 Subparts C and F.)

What does OSHA require for emergency fire exits?

Every workplace must have enough exits suitably located to enable everyone to get out of the facility quickly. Considerations include the type of structure, the number of persons exposed, the fire protection available, the type of industry involved, and the height and type of construction of the building or structure. In addition, fire doors must not be blocked or locked when employees are inside. Delayed opening of fire doors, however, is permitted when an approved alarm system is integrated into the fire door design. Exit routes from buildings must be free of obstructions and properly marked with exit signs. See 29 CFR Part 1910.36 for details about all requirements.

Do employers have to provide portable fire extinguishers?

No. But if you do, you must establish an educational program to familiarize your workers with the general principles of fire extinguisher use. If you expect your workers to use portable fire extinguishers, you must provide hands-on training in using this equipment. For details, see 29 CFR Part 1910 Subpart L.

Must employers develop emergency action plans?

Not every employer is required to have an emergency action plan. OSHA standards that require such plans include the following:

- Process Safety Management of Highly Hazardous Chemicals, 1910.119
- Fixed Extinguishing Systems, General, 1910.160
- Fire Detection Systems, 1910.164

- Grain Handling, 1910.272
- Ethylene Oxide, 1910.1047
- Methylenedianiline, 1910.1050
- 1,3 Butadiene, 1910.1051

When required, employers must develop emergency action plans that:

- Describe the routes for workers to use and procedures to follow.
- Account for all evacuated employees.
- Remain available for employee review.
- Include procedures for evacuating disabled employees.
- Address evacuation of employees who stay behind to shut down critical plant equipment.
- Include preferred means of alerting employees to a fire emergency.
- Provide for an employee alarm system throughout the workplace.
- Require an alarm system that includes voice communication or sound signals such as bells, whistles, or horns.
- Make the evacuation signal known to employees.
- Ensure emergency training.
- Require employer review of the plan with new employees and with all employees whenever the plan is changed.

Must employers have a fire prevention plan?

OSHA standards that require fire prevention plans include the following:

- Ethylene Oxide, 1910.1047
- Methylenedianiline, 1910.1050
- 1,3 Butadiene, 1910.1051

Employers covered by these standards must implement plans to minimize the frequency of evacuations. All fire prevention plans must:

- Be available for employee review.
- Include housekeeping procedures for storage and cleanup of flammable materials and flammable waste.
- Address handling and packaging of flammable waste. (Recycling of flammable waste such as paper is encouraged.)
- Cover procedures for controlling workplace ignition sources such as smoking, welding, and burning.
- Provide for proper cleaning and maintenance of heat producing equipment such as burners, heat exchangers, boilers, ovens, stoves, and fryers and



require storage of flammables away from this equipment.

- Inform workers of the potential fire hazards of their jobs and plan procedures.
- Require plan review with all new employees and with all employees whenever the plan is changed.

What are the rules for fixed extinguishing systems?

Fixed extinguishing systems throughout the workplace are among the most reliable fire fighting tools. These systems detect fires, sound an alarm, and send water to the fire and heat. To meet OSHA standards employers who have these systems must:

- Substitute (temporarily) a fire watch of trained employees to respond to fire emergencies when a fire suppression system is out of service.
- Ensure that the watch is included in the fire prevention plan and the emergency action plan.
- Post signs for systems that use agents (e.g., carbon dioxide, Halon 1211, etc.) posing a serious health hazard.