

OFFICE HAZARDS

PART II

Fire, Chemical, and Medical Emergencies



When most people think about job safety and hazards in the workplace, they think about construction and manufacturing work environments. Office hazards are either forgotten or ignored because many people think the hazards are minor when compared to the hazards of other work environments.

Office work environments often have some of the same hazards of their associated environments. Office personnel are exposed to chemicals, lifting hazards, ergonomic issues, slip and trip hazards, and others.

Office work environments are also required to comply with some of the same OSHA regulations as other work environments including training, written programs, and other OSHA requirements.

OFFICE ESCAPE:



**What to do in
the event of a fire
or other emergency**

Fire, Chemical, and Medical Emergencies

Evacuation Procedures

Know locations of exits - In case of an emergency, such as a fire, chemical spill, or natural disaster that necessitates an evacuation, you will obviously need to know how to leave the building safely and where to meet. There are multiple emergency exits throughout the facility. Make a point of learning where each exit is located – not just the exits located near your workstation. You need to know how to evacuate the building? Walk safely toward the exits. Try to stay calm and help others near you who may be in a state of panic.



Recognize evacuation signal and listen for instructions - In addition to knowing how to evacuate, you need to know what the fire alarm, or evacuation alarm, sounds like.

Go to the designated meeting area –. Once you safely evacuate the building, proceed directly toward the designated meeting area. A headcount will be taken to ensure all employees and visitors are safely out of the building. Do not go to your car or a smoking area, or leave the designated meeting area until told that it is safe to do so. Decide now with all employees in your department where to meet at a designated area

Keep exits and hallways clear - It is important to keep the exits and access to exits (including hallways) clear. Some exit doors are not used for normal access to the building and are designated for emergency use only. These doors should never be blocked by anything including office furniture or boxes.

Participate in evaluation drills - Everyone must participate in evacuation drills. Some people think that drills do not apply to them when they are on the phone or working on an important project. The best way to learn about alarms, exits, meeting areas, and evacuation procedures is to participate in the drills.

Fire Response



Notify others— sound an alarm - If you discover a fire, the first thing you should do is notify others. The fire alarm can be activated from a number of places in the facility. You can also let others know of a fire by using the paging system, phoning, or yelling.

Retrieve a fire extinguisher - Find out where fire extinguishers are located closest to your workstation. Retrieve the fire extinguisher so it is available when the trained fire responder arrives on the scene. **You can put out the fire yourself only if you are trained.**



Assess the situation - Discuss your company's policy regarding who is allowed to assess a fire and evacuation procedures.

Call the Fire Department - Call the Fire Department for all office fires. Even if you put the fire out, the Fire Department can help determine what caused the fire so another fire can possibly be prevented in the future.

Fire Prevention

In addition to being prepared if a fire does occur, it is even more important to focus on fire prevention.

Remember the fire triangle.



Fires need three things to start burning and stay burning—fuel, oxygen, and ignition source. If any one of these is missing, a fire will not exist.

Each of the items described below will fit into the category of fuel or ignition source. Eliminate the hazards and you increase the possibility of eliminating fires.

Flammable or combustible liquids - Flammable and combustible liquids, such as aerosols have a high potential for fires. They can be ignited by smoking, hot equipment, and static electricity. Make sure they are stored in appropriate “flammable cabinets” away from sources of ignition.



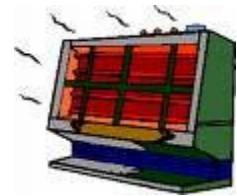
Improper storage of combustible materials - The improper storage of combustible materials is another fuel source. Paper, boxes, unused furniture, and combustible cleaning chemicals, when stored near potential ignition sources such as hot equipment, electrical equipment, and smoking areas, may cause a fire. Store combustible materials in their proper locations, away from ignition sources.

Fire Prevention cont.

Electrical cords and outlets - Damaged electrical cords with kinks, pinches, and torn insulation are fire hazards. They can overheat and ignite carpeting, paper, and boxes. Inspect electrical cords on a regular basis and replace them if they are damaged. Extension cords without internal fuses should not be used for extended periods of time. They are intended for short-term use only. Electrical outlets with damaged or missing face plates can be fire hazards. Circuit breaker boxes that are allowed to accumulate dust can also be fire hazards. Circuit breakers that continue to “trip” off should be reported to maintenance. This may be a sign of overloading or damage that could contribute to a future fire.



Space heaters - Space heaters have always been a concern when used in the office. They are often located under desks and could be kicked over, igniting the rug or any other combustible materials such as papers or files that are stored nearby.



Smoking - Smoking is another potential source of ignition. Smoking is only allowed in designated areas that are away from combustible materials, flammable liquids, and other fuel sources.

Chemicals and Spills

Most offices do not have many chemicals. Copy machine toner, liquid correction fluid, and cleaning chemicals are some of the most common chemicals that might be found in an office environment. The quantity of these chemicals is usually small. The hazard of chemicals seems minor until you consider that if a gallon jug of ammonia cleaning solution were spilled in your office it would probably make everyone run from the office coughing.

Communicate the hazards -Hazard Communication refers to your right to know about the hazards of the chemicals you work with and how to protect yourself from those hazards. Chemical containers have labels that identify the chemical, give physical and health hazards, basic personal protective equipment (PPE) recommendations, and special handling instructions. The chemical manufacturer also provides MSDSs that give even more detail about a chemical.

Evacuate the area - If you discover a spilled chemical, evacuate the immediate area. Tell others in the area about the spill and have them get away. Unless you are trained, you should not attempt to clean up a spilled chemical.



Notify trained spill responders -Notify trained spill response personnel.

Keep others away from the spill area - Keep others away from the spill area and wait for further instructions from the trained spill response personnel, who may tell you that the chemical is harmless and that it is OK to return to work while it is cleaned up, or they may tell you to evacuate the building.

Medical Emergencies

Medical emergencies can occur in the office just like anywhere else. These emergencies can range from a sprain or broken bone caused by a fall to a heart attack or stroke.



First-aid kits - First-aid kits are available with adequate supplies to treat injured employees.

Bloodborne pathogens - Bloodborne pathogens refer to viruses such as HIV and hepatitis B that are transferred through contact with infected blood. Do not touch another person's blood or potentially infected body fluids.

Call an ambulance - If the injury or illness is severe enough, do not hesitate to call an ambulance. If an employee is suffering from what appears to be a heart attack, call an ambulance immediately.

Natural Disasters

Earthquake - In an earthquake, seek protective cover under your desk or table or in a doorway. Once the earthquake has subsided, evacuate the building. Earthquakes may result in structural damage to the building. Employees should not re-enter the building until the “all-clear” signal has been given by the evacuation coordinator.



Flood - If flood warnings are given, the building will be evacuated. If you are away from work when the flood warnings are given, do not attempt to get to work for any reason.

Windstorm - In case of a windstorm, such as a tornado or hurricane, do not leave work. Move away from windows and doors, and move to an interior room or the designated shelter area.



Snow and ice storms - In case of an extremely severe snow or ice storm, you will be released from work if there is time for you to get home safely. If not, you will be directed to seek shelter at work.

Summary

Learn Evacuation Procedures

Practice Fire Prevention