

FIRE PREVENTION AND MITIGATION



BE PREPARED

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MANAGING FIRE PREVENTION

The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) recently published a [report](#) for 2019 indicating that United States (US) fire departments responded to 1,291,500 fires. Those fires caused approximately 3,700 civilian deaths, 16,600 civilian injuries and \$14.8 billion in property damage. Every 24 seconds, a fire department responds to a fire somewhere in the US. These figures have proved relatively consistent since around 2000 and are expected to continue into the near future.

Fires can be destructive to property and business continuity. Most unprepared companies which sustain a significant fire loss never reopen, and those that do rarely reach pre-loss income levels. It is crucial that every business have an effective fire emergency plan which incorporates excellent pre-fire planning and protection systems and then effective recovery plans.

The fact is that most fires are preventable. A good fire defense is always the best fire offense. Managing fire prevention well and installing effective fire protection systems will enhance the business continuity of your organization. Fire loss experience has shown, for example, that a property with an adequate fire sprinkler system results in much smaller property losses and minimal business interruption. An unsprinklered property can result in a complete loss of the property and contents, and significant business interruption impact.

Every fire prevention and response program should be location specific and based on acceptable risk tolerance. The following provides some basic considerations for the development of your own fire prevention and response program.

Emergency Preparedness: Before a Fire

- Establish an Emergency Preparedness Plan (EPP) that takes prevention, emergency response, and disaster recovery into consideration. If an EPP is already in place, review and update it as needed for fire readiness.

It is always prudent to keep a current inventory of contents by area, and pictures to help identify damages most effectively.

- Designate an Emergency Coordinator and an EPP Team. Assign responsibility to specific employees for advance arrangements to initiate the plan.
- Conduct a hazard assessment and safety appraisal of the facility and its operations.
- Develop smoking regulations that are supported and enforced by management.
- Develop safe procedures for handling and storing flammable gases and liquids.
- Use only authorized electrical appliances and machines, and limit the use of temporary electrical wiring (extension cords and power strips). Be careful not to overload any particular electrical circuits. Use surge protected and ground fault circuit interrupted (GFCI) power strips when needed.
- Adopt a safe means of performing hot work (e.g., welding).
- Employ good housekeeping methods; do not allow rubbish to accumulate.
- Upgrade the facility to meet current fire codes.
- Use noncombustible and fire-resistant building materials.
- Ensure that a preventive maintenance program for operational equipment (building utilities, processing equipment, and material handling equipment) meets manufacturer's specifications and industry standards. Thermographic imaging may prove an incredible tool to help identify undesirable conditions with electrical systems, mechanical systems such as conveyors or operating equipment.
- Test all fire and life safety detection and suppression equipment per local and national fire codes.
- Ensure that there is an adequate water supply for the sprinkler system. Evaluate the water supply's volume, pressure, and duration (e.g., pressure, suction,

or gravity/elevated tanks). When reservoirs, ponds, rivers, and other similar bodies of water are used to supply the sprinkler system, consider and evaluate any unusual conditions (e.g., droughts, freeze-ups, etc.).

- Meet with the local fire department to familiarize them with special hazards and emergency procedures. Providing the fire department with building and site schematics will help them plan their response more effectively.
- Your business continuity plan should incorporate mutually-beneficial agreements with competitors and/or suppliers or customers to help maintain acceptable productivity levels during loss restoration periods.
- Keep a list of all vendors' and key customers' telephone numbers and other important contact information available and secured.
- Provide an alert and warning system for all personnel on the premises.
- Plan fire evacuation routes, mark them clearly, and drill employees in using them.
- Inspect all evacuation routes daily.
- Practice your evacuation plan.

Emergency Response: During a Fire

- Conduct a roll call of all personnel, including visitors.
- Only after the fire department indicates it is safe to do so, assess the structure for damage.
- Inspect all utilities and turn off those that are damaged.
- Protect equipment and inventory against further damage from water or exposure to the elements.
- Restore fire detection and suppression systems where possible. Damaged systems should be repaired and restored as soon as possible.
- Arrange for security at the scene.
- Photograph and document the damage.
- In coordination with your insurance carrier and broker, begin salvage operations to restore operations efficiently.

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