

did you know?

The public considers sprinkler systems a “reasonable level of care.” In buildings without them, building owners have had to pay out up to millions of dollars per life lost.

The information in this Health and Safety Recap is for general interest only and does not take into account specific federal or provincial legislation. Make sure to educate yourself regarding the specific federal or provincial legislation that may apply to your company.



Fire Safety

Most fires are preventable. Those responsible for workplaces and other buildings to which the public have access can avoid fires by taking responsibility and adopting the right behaviours and procedures.

What are the hazards?

A fire in the workplace presents huge risks to property and the health of your employees and the public. It can physically damage or destroy buildings, contents and equipment. It can also be responsible for serious injuries and even death. Common injuries include burns, respiratory damage from smoke inhalation, oxygen depletion and trauma (such as broken bones) from escape attempts.

Fires need three things to start: a source of ignition (heat), a source of fuel (something that burns) and oxygen.

- Sources of ignition include heaters, lighting, naked flames, electrical equipment, smokers' materials (cigarettes, matches, etc.), and anything else that can get very hot or cause sparks.
- Sources of fuel include wood, paper, plastic, rubber, foam, loose packaging materials, waste and furniture.
- Air is the primary source of oxygen. Other sources include chemicals that contain oxidizing agents, and oxygen supplies from cylinder storage and piped systems.

What should I do?

Employers (and building owners) should carry out a fire safety risk assessment and keep it up to date. This can be carried out either as part of an overall risk assessment or as a separate exercise.

Based on the findings of the assessment, employers should make sure that adequate and appropriate fire safety measures are in place to minimize the risk of injury or loss of life in the event of a fire.

To help prevent fire in the workplace, your risk assessment should identify what could cause a fire to start—that is, sources of ignition and substances that burn—and the people who may be at risk. Your risk assessment should also identify dangerous substances that can result in fires or explosions.

Once you have identified the risks, you can take appropriate action to control them. Consider whether you can avoid them altogether or, if this is not possible, how you can reduce the risks and manage them. Also consider how you will protect people if there is a fire.

- Carry out a fire safety risk assessment.
- Keep sources of ignition and flammable substances apart.
- Avoid accidental fires. For example, make sure heaters cannot be knocked over.

- Ensure good housekeeping at all times, such as avoiding build-up of rubbish that could burn.
- Determine how you can detect fires and warn people quickly if they start, such as by installing smoke alarms and fire alarms or bells.
- Have the correct equipment for putting a fire out quickly.
- Keep fire exits and escape routes clearly marked and unobstructed at all times.
- Ensure your workers receive appropriate training on procedures they need to follow, including fire drills.
- Review and update your risk assessment regularly.

Case Study

Scenario	How to Prevent the Fire
<p>A shopkeeper regularly put packing waste by the back door of his store as he stocked the shelves after a delivery. His workers sometimes opened the back door to have a cigarette break outside.</p> <p>One week he left the pile of garbage for several days, and a discarded cigarette butt caused it to catch fire. By the time the fire was spotted and put out, it had caused substantial damage to the shopkeeper's back door and shelving units. There was a significant cost in damaged stock and repairs.</p>	<p>This fire could have been easily prevented if the shopkeeper had completed his risk assessment and taken simple steps to control the risks.</p>