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the Workplace: EP60

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the Informer

A monthly newsletter addressing workplace safety by Iowa Municipalities Workers' Compensation Association.

Check those fire extinguishers

Fire Prevention Week is October 5-11 and IMWCA wants to encourage every member to know the basics about fire extinguisher safety.

Different types of fires require different types of extinguishers. Most of us are familiar with the more common A, B, and C class extinguishers. Class A extinguishers put out ordinary combustible materials such as wood, paper and many plastics. Class B extinguishers put out fires involving flammable liquids, such as grease, gasoline, oil and oil-based paints. Class C extinguishers are for fires involving electrical equipment, appliances, tools or other equipment that is energized or plugged into a power source. The most common extinguisher is a multi-purpose Class ABC intended for use on the most common fires at home and at work.

Two more types of extinguishers that are not as widely known are Class D and K. Class D extinguishers are designed for use on flammable metals,

and they are often specific for the type of metal in question.

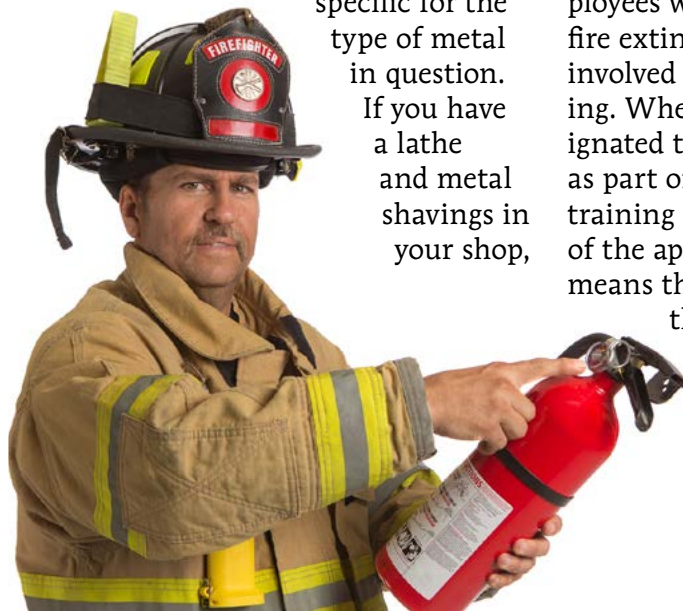
If you have a lathe and metal shavings in your shop,

you may have a need for a Class D extinguisher. The Class K extinguisher is intended for use on fires involving vegetable oils, animal oils or fats used in cooking.

OSHA has quite a bit to say when it comes to fire safety. The Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 1910.157 covers the placement, use, maintenance and testing of portable fire extinguishers provided for the use of employees. Some of the key points spelled out in the standard are the purpose of a fire extinguisher and the difference between education and training. The purpose of a workplace fire extinguisher is to control or extinguish a small or incipient fire and to protect evacuation routes that a fire may block directly or indirectly with smoke or burning or smoldering materials.

OSHA says where the employer has provided portable fire extinguishers for employee use in the workplace, the employer shall also provide an education program to familiarize the employees with the general principles of fire extinguisher use and the hazards involved with incipient stage firefighting. When employees have been designated to use firefighting equipment as part of the emergency action plan, training shall be provided in the use of the appropriate equipment. Training means the process of making proficient through instruction and hands-on practice in the operation of equipment. At a minimum, hands-on training should include the actual discharging of fire extinguishers appropriate for the type of fires expected.

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To burn, or not to burn...

Not too many years ago, it was common practice to burn waste— from leaves and brush to household trash we now send to the landfill. Some of us can remember taking out the trash in a paper grocery sack, placing it in the burn barrel out back, lighting it and tossing even more trash on to get a good fire going.

Things have certainly changed from the days of smelling burning leaves in the fall to packing those compost bags full and setting them out on trash day. While it's still legal to burn leaves and yard debris at the site where

it originates, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) strongly encourages composting and mulching instead. When you burn trash and leaves, you're making poison. Among the common pollutants trash and leaf fires can release in the air are dioxins, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, volatile organic compounds, carbon monoxide and ash. These pollutants are poisonous to breathe and are especially dangerous for small children, the elderly and people with respiratory and heart conditions. Burning 100 pounds of brush will release about 40 pounds of carbon—which translates to about 147 pounds of carbon dioxide—back into the atmosphere.

Far too often, people burn leaves and brush from sheer habit, tradition, or simply because it's the easiest way to solve an immediate problem. A better alternative is to compost the leaves and chip the brush for mulch. While chipping and shredding can be more expensive in the short run, the resulting compost and mulch can provide valuable nutrients to the soil, control weeds and reduce water evaporation from the soil. For many municipalities, selling the compost provides a revenue stream to recover the cost. Municipalities that cannot afford to purchase a chipper have the option to hire a grinding service to come in several times a year or as needed to treat the brush.

Which leads to the most important reason to consider composting and chipping brush over burning—the safety of your employees. IMWCA members have experienced two serious events in the past year that occurred during a brush-burning exercise. One resulted in a fatality. So the next time a brush pile begins to build up, think about the alternatives to burning. We want every employee to have the opportunity to go home safe at the end of their day.



Extinguishers, *continued from page 1*

Last, but not least, we want you to pay attention to extinguisher inspection, maintenance and testing. OSHA says the employer shall be responsible for all of the above in the workplace. A monthly inspection consists of insuring extinguishers are in the designated place, no obstructions to access or visibility and the pressure gauge reading or indicator is in the operable range. It also includes a visual inspection of the cylinder, name plate and pull ring and nozzle or horn. OSHA also requires an annual inspection and recommends a third party perform this inspection. Hydrostatic testing is also required on a 5- or 12-year cycle. See table L-1 in the standard for the specific requirement. And speaking of the standard, here's a link: https://www.osha.gov/pls/oshaweb/owadisp.show_document?p_table=STANDARDS&p_id=9811.

So, there you have it. Ensure every employee knows the policy and what to do in event of a fire. Know the locations and how to use the extinguisher in your workplace, and understand the limitations of your extinguisher. Inspect the extinguishers monthly and have an annual inspection performed by a third party, and get the hydrostatic testing done as recommended. Most of all, make sure everyone gets home safe at the end of the day.

To learn more about fire safety, check out the Online University courses at: <https://www.imwca.org/SiteCollectionDocuments/OnlineUniversityCourse-List.pdf>



This year, the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) has designated National Fire Prevention Week October 5-11. The theme is “Working Smoke Alarms Save Lives—Test Yours Every Month.”

Smoke alarms have become a common feature in homes today, so much so that it’s easy to take them for granted. Recent surveys indicate about 97 percent of households have at least one smoke alarm. When smoke alarms were present in home fires considered large enough to activate them, they operated 86 percent of the time. More than one-third of home fire deaths resulted from fires where no smoke alarms were present; and one-quarter of the deaths were caused by fires in properties where alarms were present but failed to operate.

Smoke alarm failures usually result from missing, disconnected or dead batteries. People are most likely to remove or disconnect batteries because of nuisance activations. Sometimes the chirping to warn of a low battery is interpreted as a nuisance alarm. Almost three-quarters of nuisance alarms, other than low battery chirping, are due to cooking. If the alarm in or near the kitchen is sounding too often, the problem may be solved by moving the alarm. NFPA code states that unless designed

specifically for the area, all smoke alarms should be at least 10 feet away from cooking appliances. If space constraints make it necessary to have a smoke alarm within 10-20 feet of the kitchen stove, either a photoelectric alarm or an alarm with a hush feature that can temporarily be silenced without disabling the alarm should be used.

If you read the cover story about fire extinguishers, you know they require a monthly check. So do smoke alarms! Smoke alarms should be tested at least once every month to ensure that the batteries and the units themselves are still working. NFPA recommends conventional (not long life) batteries should be replaced in accordance with the manufacturer’s instructions, at least one a year. Last but not least, smoke alarms have a shelf life. NFPA recommends smoke alarms be replaced 10 years from the date of manufacture.

To learn more about Fire Prevention Week and smoke alarms, visit <http://www.nfpa.org/safety-information/fire-prevention-week>. Here you will find many resources for fire safety week; including facts about fire, a fire prevention week quiz, tools for teachers, kids and families. Take a look!

Safely Speaking

Welcome Scott Smith

The Iowa League of Cities welcomes Scott Smith as an IMWCA loss control representative. Smith received his BA from Indiana University of Pennsylvania and his MPA from the University of Pittsburgh. He has over 25 years of experience in the recycling/waste management industry serving in several different roles. These roles include safety coordinator, education coordinator and administrator. Scott also serves on the Board of Directors for Keep Iowa Beautiful, the Board of Directors for the Boone County Historical Society and served as a member of the IMWCA Loss Control Advisory Committee.



IMWCA Informer is a monthly newsletter published by the Iowa Municipalities Workers' Compensation Association (IMWCA) in cooperation with the Iowa League of Cities.

This newsletter is designed to educate local officials on workers' compensation issues. Suggestions for articles or topics to appear in IMWCA Informer are always welcome. Contact IMWCA at (515) 244-7282. You may also view this publication online at www.imwca.org.

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