

Safety For You: Be safe in the workplace

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Prevent workplace fires! Share these safety tips to keep workers safe and businesses open.



Photo courtesy of the U.S. Fire Administration

A fire in an office or store can be devastating to a community. In addition to potential deaths and property loss, people may lose their jobs and the community may lose a vital service provided by the business.

The uncertain future caused by COVID-19 can also make the economic effect of a fire on a business much worse. Some businesses may have a hard time recovering financially after being shut down for several months due to the pandemic.

Every year in the United States there are 17,000 office and store fires that cause over \$800 million in direct property damage.

According to the [U.S. Fire Administration](#), Cooking is the leading cause of office and store fires. In 2018:

- 33.2% of office and store fires were caused by cooking,
- 10.9% were due to electrical malfunction,
- 8.7% were due to heating,
- 7.6% were caused by other unintentional reasons or carelessness, and
- 7.1% were caused by appliances.

Many causes of office and store fires are the same as those for home fires. Since emergencies happen when we least expect them, prevention and escape planning is essential.

The good news: Modern building design and fire codes protect most offices and stores from fire. However, according to [ESCAPE Fire Safety](#), there are important fire safety practices that employees and employers should follow to help prevent workplace fires, keep workers safe and keep offices and stores open.

Employees should:

- Check for damaged electrical cords and cables. Don't overload outlets and power strips.
- Keep anything that can burn away from electrical equipment.
- Never leave portable heating devices unattended.
- Keep your workspace and equipment clean, dry and well ventilated.
- Plan and practice multiple escape routes in case one is blocked.
- Ensure windows can be opened and screens can be removed.
- Remove any obstacles from exits.

Employers need to prepare for emergencies.

- Make sure smoke alarms and fire sprinklers are properly installed and working.
- Post clear fire escape plans on every level of a building.
- Teach employees about exit locations, escape routes and fire protection equipment.
- Check the condition of fire ladders and escapes.
- Conduct regular emergency drills.

If there is a fire, building workers should:

- Call 911.
- Notify co-workers of the fire.
- Never use the elevator if there is a fire or during a fire alarm activation. Walk, don't run, down the stairs.

If workers can't evacuate, they should:

- Seal door gaps with jackets.
- Wait at the window.
- Remain calm.

For more information on fire safety in a variety of workplaces, visit www.osha.org.

Workplace Fire Safety

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17, 

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