



Establishing Smoking Controls

Careless smoking is a major cause of fires in the United States each year. In industrial facilities, employees often disregard management's concerns for fire safety in the plant environment. The problem is compounded by the presence of combustible and flammable materials throughout the production and storage areas.

Although complete prohibition of smoking is the ideal solution, it is not always realistic. Employees might smoke surreptitiously, if they cannot do so openly. A more practical option is the establishment of formal smoking regulations that can be effectively monitored. Management should initially survey its operation to find areas where smoking can be permitted or prohibited. When establishing smoking regulations, management should consider the following:

1. Smoking must be prohibited in areas where explosives, flammable liquids or gases, and combustible dust or fibers are processed and stored. The boundaries of these areas should extend a sufficient distance from actual hazards. This will reduce the possibility that a hazardous condition, such as a flammable liquid spill, will find smoking materials as an ignition source.
2. Smoking rooms near hazardous areas must be under positive pressure to keep those rooms clear of hazardous atmospheres.
3. Smoking should be prohibited in warehouse areas where combustible merchandise is stored. The storage could be ignited by a carelessly tossed cigarette or match.
4. Areas where smoking is prohibited must be clearly marked "NO SMOKING," and the reason should be stated for its prohibition, for example, "FLAMMABLE LIQUIDS IN USE."
5. Areas where smoking is permitted need to be clearly marked with appropriate signs and lines on the floor.
6. Smoking areas should be equipped with portable fire extinguishers. Automatic sprinkler protection is also desirable in designated smoking areas.
7. If employees are prohibited from carrying lighters and matches, then smoking areas need to be equipped with electric lighters.

8. Smoking areas should be adequately provided with noncombustible ashtrays or sand buckets for holding smoking materials. If ashtrays are used, they must be designed with steeply sloping sides to prevent burning cigarettes from falling onto surrounding surfaces.
9. Employees are responsible for properly disposing spent cigarette butts and ashes from ashtrays as part of the housekeeping process. As live cigarette butts may be concealed in the ashes, these materials should not be placed in wastebaskets with combustible trash. Covered metal containers are used exclusively for disposal of smoking debris.
10. Your smoking policy should conform to any applicable state law regarding smoking in the workplace.

Once management has established smoking regulations, it must educate employees to understand that such regulations reduce the potential for fire losses. Management must also be ready to enforce its regulations uniformly, and to take corrective action when necessary.

As part of its safety program, management should also periodically review its smoking regulations to make certain that they conform to any changes in the facility.