5 fire prevention tips for small businesses.



According to U.S. Fire Administration statistics, every year there are more than 16,500 workplace fires, causing nearly a billion dollars in direct property damage. However, if you put the right safety measures in place, most fires can be prevented. Follow these fire prevention tips for small businesses to protect your workplace and employees.

Tip #1: Install and maintain smoke detection and fire containment systems.

Start with the basics: make sure your workplace has plenty of smoke detectors and fire extinguishers. The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) recommends hardwired smoke detectors on every floor of the building, plus a smoke detector in each stairway. The number of detectors on each floor will depend on how large the area is. According to the NFPA, one smoke detector will cover a radius of approximately 21 square feet and an area of 1,385 square feet. The maximum distance between two smoke alarms should be 30 feet.

According to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), fire extinguishers should be placed so that the travel distance from any point of the protected area to the nearest extinguisher is no further than 100 feet. Every floor must have an extinguisher. Read the complete list of OSHA regulations on their website.

Should you install a fire sprinkler system? These systems may be required for some buildings, depending on local building codes. Even if they are not required, however, sprinklers could still be worth the investment if your business has a lot of costly equipment. Sprinklers protect your building while it is unoccupied, saving your equipment and permanent fixtures when no one is there to use fire extinguishers or hear smoke alarms.

Test all fire prevention and containment equipment regularly to ensure they are in good working condition and ready for action, if needed.

Tip #2: Eliminate common fire hazards.

Fires in the workplace can arise from some of the same hazards that cause home fires. Have your employees check their work areas regularly for:

- Overloaded electrical outlets
- Frayed electrical cords and cables
- Flammable materials too close to electrical equipment or heating elements
- Clutter and debris on the floor and in walking areas

Avoid using portable heating devices in the workplace. If they are permitted, make sure employees never leave them unattended. And have all electronics regularly serviced to be sure they're in good working condition.

Tip #3: Educate your employees.

In addition to having your employees check for fire hazards, make sure they are informed of all fire safety procedures, including:

- Evacuation routes and procedures, including exit locations and assembly points
- How to use fire extinguishers and know where they are located
- Emergency communication protocols

Keep their knowledge current with periodic fire drills and refresher courses. Evacuation routes and fire extinguisher directions should be prominently posted.

Tip #4: Establish cooking safety rules.

Just like at home, cooking is one of the most common causes of workplace fires. Someone burns a bagel in the break room, and it ends up costing your business thousands in damages. Establish these rules for workplace cooking safety:

- Clean up after yourself — grease and crumbs are flammable
- Periodically check cords on cooking appliances (toaster, microwave, coffeemaker, etc.) to be sure they aren't frayed
- Unplug small appliances when not in use, especially at the end of the day
- Never leave appliances unattended when in use

Of course, food service businesses, like restaurants or bakeries, will have a much longer list of safety rules;

these rules pertain to businesses with small kitchens for employee use.

Tip #5: Take advantage of safety services offered through your insurance company.

Businesses of all sizes can benefit from safety services to help prevent work-related accidents and injuries. Ask your agent if your commercial policy includes complimentary safety resources, like written safety programs, training materials, videos, and for those with more complex risks, loss control consultants.

Follow these fire prevention tips for your small business, and you'll greatly reduce the risk of workplace fires. However, no amount of prevention can make your business 100% fireproof. That's why it's important to have reliable business insurance from an established carrier, like Patriot Insurance Company.

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