By the Numbers – Fire Extinguishers



DID YOU KNOW?

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, fires and explosion accounted for 148 workplace deaths in 2013—or 3.4% of all fatal occupational injuries for the year. Despite industry and regulatory efforts to improve fire safety, this number (and percentage) has remained stubbornly constant since 2007. Despite this levelling off, it's clear that OSHA intends that employers should remain committed to finding ways to reduce the number of fire related fatalities in the workplace, and intends to enforce a high standard for fire safety.

OSHA stipulates that businesses should train workers regarding potential fire hazards in their workplace, and also on what procedures should be followed in the event of a fire emergency. OSHA recommends that all employers have an emergency evacuation/action plan in place in case of fire—featuring safety assignments for key personnel—and requires these plans for certain industries, such as hazardous chemical processing.

Many of OSHA's fire safety recommendations are industry- or even job-specific. For example, in the construction industry, OSHA calls for a "fire plan" to be formulated prior to any demolition job. Other OSHA-mandated standards – like the presence of adequate fire exits – are required in every industry.

There are many common misconceptions related to OSHA's fire safety requirements. One is that all employers are required to have portable fire extinguishers on-site. While this is not the case in most industries, OSHA does require that if employers do choose to provide extinguishers, employees must be trained on their use. Another misconception is that OSHA requires all employers to have fixed extinguishing or automatic sprinkler systems in all workplaces. Again, only in certain industries are…