

BUSINESS FIRE SAFETY

Ideas to keep you safe at work.



Fire is always unexpected. It demands fast decisions followed by quick action in an environment that could be loud, smoke-filled, dark and hot. Every business should have an emergency plan that outlines employee fire response and evacuation routes, prevention tips, drills and other related training.



Each year in the U.S. 70-80,000 serious workplace fires occur. These fires cause the deaths of nearly 200 and injure another 5, 000 employees. It is estimated that property losses from workplace fires exceed \$2 billion annually. Most workplace fires can be avoided by adopting an emergency plan that includes workplace fire prevention, employee training and regularly scheduled fire drills.



As a business owner it is your responsibility to write an emergency plan. You are the expert for your building. You know the layout of the workspace, the concerns of your employees and needs of your business. You must write a plan and regularly update it to reflect changes to your business, i.e. relocation to a new building or change in number of employees.

The information in this booklet will assist you in the development of an emergency plan for your business. You will also find fire prevention tips and employee training guidelines. This booklet combined with your knowledge should enable you to write procedures that will protect your business and your employees.

Your business may have additional planning and safety requirements set by the San Antonio Fire Code. Visit the San Antonio Fire Department's website, www.sanantonio.gov/safd for more information.

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For more fire safety information,
visit our website at:
www.sanantonio.gov/safd

DEVELOP AN EMERGENCY PLAN

Getting started

Whether a business owner, an employee or committee is writing the emergency plan, it is important that they have a clear understanding of the facility, employees and business practices. This information will provide a starting point for the development of an emergency plan.

- Identify the fire and life safety systems present—including fire alarm system, smoke detectors, voice alarm system, sprinklers, fire extinguishers, manual pull alarms, and fire doors.
- Consider the building occupants. Are they familiar with the facility or is it a changing population, as in a retail store or restaurant?
- Note any special needs that individuals may have, such as non-English speaking or physical disabilities. Make a list of concerns regarding evacuation routes, guests, and special hazards associated with the business.

Create a map

Design a basic plan for each floor. Indicate the location of all fire exits, manual pull stations, and extinguishing equipment. Post the floor plan throughout the building. Mark YOU ARE HERE according to the location of the posted plan. Then, mark the two closest fire exits. Also, note that elevators must not be used as a fire exit.

Develop evacuation procedures

Train employees to stop what they are doing and evacuate the building whenever the fire alarm sounds. If there is an elevator in the building, employees should be trained to use the stairs during an emergency evacuation.

It is important that employees not only evacuate the building when the fire alarm sounds, but also move away from the building to the designated meeting place. This is a where employees can assemble and make a head count in a safe location. The meeting place should be far enough away from the building to keep employees out of the way of firefighting activities and away from falling glass and debris.

Schedule regular employee training

Training employees is the best way to prevent and prepare for the possibility of a fire and should be offered at least once a year. The San Antonio Fire Department can provide assistance if you need help planning fire safety training for employees. A number of teaching guides and fire fact sheets have been developed to help prepare and present fire prevention and safety training programs for your employees. All materials can be downloaded from the San Antonio Fire Department's website.

The San Antonio Fire Department has also assembled a lending library of videos available to meet your training needs. All training videos are loaned out free of charge to businesses in the City of San Antonio.

Conduct fire drills

It is important that everyone fully understands what to do in the event of a fire in the building.

Fire drills can make the difference in helping employees know what to do when a fire occurs. Fire drills should be scheduled and conducted for all shifts and employees. Fire drills may be pre-announced or unannounced. Employees should duplicate as closely as possible the actions they would take if a fire occurred. Fire drills are the best indicator that during a fire emergency, evacuation will go smoothly and successfully.

Update the plan annually

The plan should be reviewed and necessary updates made at least once a year. These changes should reflect any changes to the building/neighborhood, which affect employee evacuation. If changes are made to the evacuation routes it is important to ensure that all employees are notified of the change(s).

ALTERNATE EVACUATION PROCEDURES

All employees should understand evacuation procedures for persons who are unable to negotiate exit stairs, especially if clients or guests regularly enter the business. These instructions are also useful for any employee who becomes trapped and can not evacuate the building.

- Persons who can not use stairwells should be instructed to wait near the exit stairwell until everyone has evacuated the floor and traffic in the stairwell has cleared. Then they should enter the stairwell with one or two assistants and wait on the landing. Making certain the door is securely closed and wait for further assistance. The Fire Department will send firefighters to assist if further evacuation is necessary.
- If there are too many individuals to wait on the landing, an area of refuge should be sought on the floor. An area of refuge is a room with a door to protect from smoke, a phone to call 911 and a window to signal for help. It is important to keep the door and window closed to maintain a safe environment for as long as possible.
- Employees should not attempt to carry co-workers down the stairs unless conditions in the stairwell become threatening.

WORKPLACE FIRE PREVENTION

- Extension cords can be dangerous. Never run them under carpets, or anywhere they can be pinched under or behind furniture. Avoid overloading electrical sockets and plugging extension cords together.
- Keep all electrical appliances away from anything that can catch fire. Remember to always turn them off at the end of each day. This is especially important of appliances in the kitchen or break room.
- Pay attention to housekeeping issues. Try not to clutter exits, stairways, and storage areas with waste paper, empty boxes, and other fire hazards. If the recycling or garbage receptacles are overflowing contact the waste removal agency to make a collection.
- Designate smoking areas away from combustible pathways or beauty bark. Where smoking is permitted, provide non-combustible receptacles for cigarette ends as distinct from containers for waste.
- Arson is the largest single cause of fires in general office buildings. Keep a watch out for fire hazards (i.e. dry vegetation or lights out) and report any concerns to authorities.
- If you see a fire hazard or have concerns, share them with building management.

IF FIRE STRIKES

Sound the alarm to notify co-workers, no matter how small the fire, and then leave the area quickly. Close, but do not lock, doors as you make your way out of the building.

- Do not use the elevators, head towards the nearest stairwell.
- Make certain your co-workers are evacuating the area. Also make certain that 911 has been called to get help on the way.
- If there is smoke, crawl low underneath it and test doors for heat before you open them. If your primary escape route can't be used quickly, go to your second exit.
- Once outside, go to the assigned meeting place for your building. Follow the instructions of fire and security personnel. Stay out of the way, and do not go back into the building until they say it is safe.
- One person should be assigned to notify on-scene fire fighters of any persons remaining in the building or otherwise not accounted for.

FIRE EXTINGUISHERS

The type of fire extinguisher(s) required in your workplace is determined by the type of business and the materials found in the building. Most offices are required by the **San Antonio Fire Code** to have at least one Class 2A fire extinguisher on every floor. They should be placed where people usually walk and in locations that do not make people travel more than 75 feet to reach one. Fire extinguishers must be placed so that they can be easily seen and are easy to reach.

Fire extinguishers must be serviced each year to ensure that, if there is a fire, the extinguisher will work properly. The person who services your fire extinguisher must be certified by the **San Antonio Fire Department**. When the extinguisher technician services your fire extinguisher, they will attach a tag to it to indicate it has been serviced and on what date it is due for its next service.

Remember the P.A.S.S. Word

Properly operated, fire extinguishers can help stop a small fire before it has a chance to grow out of control. There are four basic steps to using a fire extinguisher.

Pull the safety pin by grabbing the ring and twisting.

Aim the hose at the base of the fire.

Squeeze the handle.

Sweep the hose from side to side while discharging.

& If the fire gets bigger, close the door to slow the spread of heat and smoke and evacuate.

Be Prepared

Training and practice are the best ways to prepare for emergencies. Make certain you know the P.A.S.S. system and understand how to safely use a fire extinguisher before the need ever arises.

- Don't force yourself to fight a fire that makes you uncomfortable or puts you at risk.
- Always let someone know and make certain 911 has been called before using an extinguisher on a fire.
- Fire extinguishers are small quick fixes. If you are unable to put out the fire with one extinguisher, leave and close the door behind you.
- Don't let the fire come between you and your exit. Keep your back to the exit and the fire in front of you.



San Antonio Fire Department Public Education Resources

Community Safety &
Education
210-207-8422
Employee Training Guides
Training Videos and DVDs
Fire Safety Handouts