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# safety bulletin

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## Fire Prevention Planning

Fire is one of the leading threats in the workplace, including in veterinary settings. Whether you operate out of a brick-and-mortar facility, from a mobile practice vehicle, or at an off-site location, you may experience a workplace fire at some point in your career.

Implementing a fire prevention strategy is the best way to reduce the risk of a fire damaging your workplace and potentially harming you or your employees, clients, or patients. An effective fire prevention strategy includes multiple components, such as basic fire prevention planning; a workplace hazard assessment (and corrective action based on the results of the assessment); and ongoing training.

### Fire Prevention Plan

The primary objective of a fire prevention plan is to eliminate potential causes, prevent loss of life and property, and comply with OSHA's standard on fire prevention (29 CFR 1910.39). An effective fire prevention plan equips employees with the knowledge required to recognize, report, and control fire hazards.



*According to OSHA reports, more than 200 workplace fires occur each day, and more than 5,000 people are injured by workplace fires annually.*

Any business with 10 or more employees is required to have a written plan. Although OSHA allows businesses with fewer than 10 employees to opt for a verbal fire prevention plan, it is strongly recommended that this plan, once developed, is written down and made easily accessible to all staff. A written plan serves as a valuable training tool and resource by ensuring clear and consistent information is available to everyone. In addition, it ensures OSHA compliance.

## An Effective Fire Prevention Plan:

- Lists all fire hazards, including materials, and their proper handling and storage procedures
- Distinguishes potential ignition sources and methods of control
- Outlines the types of fire protection equipment necessary and available to control each hazard as well as the location of the equipment and how to use it
- Identifies who is responsible for managing both individual hazards and the process for maintaining fire protection equipment and systems
- Identifies training and management responsibilities in regard to fire prevention, control, response, and plan management
- Describes hazard control and safeguards, such as work practices, maintenance, and housekeeping procedures

## Workplace Fire Hazard Assessment

The typical veterinary workplace contains many potential fire hazards, all of which need to be managed to ensure the safety of both animals and humans. A workplace fire hazard assessment enables your team to identify and correct any fire hazards, as well as other safety hazards. Examples of items that should be inspected include:

- **Electrical:** Overloaded electrical outlets or power strips, damaged or frayed electrical cords, malfunctioning or poorly maintained electrical equipment, equipment or vehicles with damaged wiring
- **Equipment:** Surgical lasers, anesthetic machines and equipment, oxygen concentrators and tanks, refrigerators, breakroom cooking appliances
- **Combustible Materials:** Materials like straw or hay, paper-based records, accumulated boxes
- **Flammable Liquids:** Alcohol-based solutions, oils, laboratory supplies, cleaning agents or disinfectants
- **Gases:** Flammable anesthetic agents, gas cylinders and lines
- **Fuel:** Gasoline or diesel in vehicle(s) or gas cans, kerosene or propane tanks and equipment, fuel systems
- **Heating Systems:** HVAC systems, heating units, portable heaters, heat lamps
- **Housekeeping & Storage:** Accumulation of combustible waste materials, improperly stored flammable substances, accumulation of dust and debris in electrical equipment, combustible dust in ventilation systems
- **Open Flames:** Candles, lighters, burn bins, incinerators
- **Other Power Systems:** Generators and associated power systems

It is essential for veterinary facilities to conduct regular fire hazard assessments and implement preventive measures to mitigate potential risks and ensure a safe environment. Regular drills and training sessions can help increase preparedness for emergency situations.

## Fire Hazard Corrective Action

When identified or suspected fire hazards are discovered during a workplace assessment, immediate steps must be taken to address them. This action involves implementing measures to eliminate or reduce the risk of potential fire incidents.

Regular housekeeping practices are a necessary part of corrective action, involving the proper disposal of waste materials and maintaining a clutter-free environment. By promptly addressing and correcting identified hazards, a safer environment is created for both people and patients.

## Training as a Fire Prevention Strategy

Teaching staff about proper emergency procedures is a crucial component of fire prevention. As part of training, employees should learn:

- Where to access or reference the fire prevention plan
- Good housekeeping practices
- Safe working practices
- How to perform a workplace inspection – or how to recognize potential fire hazards
- Who and how to notify them in the event of a fire or fire hazards
- How to operate on-site fire systems, including portable fire extinguishers
- Procedures for handling and storing highly combustible materials

Training should occur when an employee is hired, annually, when new fire hazards are introduced, and upon transferring to new work areas. Detailed records should be maintained for up to five years.

## One Hazard, Two Outcomes: Damaged Cord in Refrigerator at Clinic A

The refrigerator used to store medications and vaccines at Clinic A has been in use at the practice for several years. Over time, a significant amount of pet hair has accumulated behind the refrigerator.



A portion of the protective covering that encases the refrigerator's cord has begun to fray and expose the internal wiring. The damage is not visible unless the refrigerator is pulled away from the wall. Due to the compromised casing, the exposed cord becomes extremely hot.

**Outcome A:** Because the refrigerator shows no obvious signs of damage, Clinic A does not inspect it routinely. One day, some paper and the pet fur trapped behind the refrigerator catch fire due to the heat emanating from the exposed wiring.

**Outcome B:** As part of their fire prevention plan, Clinic A has implemented a bi-monthly procedure in which rotating staff members are given a checklist of hazards and are tasked with thoroughly inspecting all practice equipment that plugs into a socket. During one of these checks, the frayed cord covering is discovered, and the practice manager is alerted. After looking into the cost of purchasing a replacement refrigerator, Clinic A decides to hire a licensed electrician to replace the damaged cord. They also begin budgeting for a new refrigerator.

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