Fire Prevention on Construction Sites

Construction sites are always considered high-risk for a multitude of reasons. While employee injuries, slip and fall risks, and material theft are among some of the hazards, construction fires are one of the most common and costly dangers. According to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), an average of 3,840 construction fires occurred between 2013 and 2017. Those fires caused an estimated $304 million in property damage.

How do these fires start?

Flammable and combustible materials
Oftentimes, gas cans, oils, paints, and other combustible materials are left on jobsites and not properly stored. *Make certain all materials are being used properly and stored safely onsite.*

Smoking
Smoking may occur on the jobsite. Ensure there's a safe smoking area for all employees, vendors, and contractors, complete with proper disposal. The safe smoking area should be a safe distance away from any active construction. *No smoking should be allowed in any space other than where it's marked as safe to do so.*

Temporary Heaters
Do your employees use temporary heating sources on site to keep warm? If so, are they plugged in properly? Will they overload the circuit? Make certain all combustible materials have been moved away from the heating source. *Heating sources should never be used without supervision.*

Hot Work
If you're welding, grinding, or doing any other type of hot work onsite, a program should be implemented to watch for fire and sparks. Hot work should be done away from any combustible materials and completed 30 minutes before any employees leave the jobsite to ensure materials have properly cooled.

Damaged electrical cords
Cords tend to be the first thing damaged on jobsites. Foot traffic, heavy equipment traffic, and outdoor elements contribute to extensive wear and tear on exposed cords. Check for fraying and other damage that could cause sparks.

Other ways to prevent fires on site

Fire Extinguishers
One reason fires on construction sites are so costly is the lack of fire protection.
Oftentimes, sprinkler systems aren't yet installed and fire extinguishers are scarce. When protecting your site against fire and other hazards, consider where your fire extinguishers are placed. Do employees know where to locate a fire extinguisher? Have your employees been trained to use a fire extinguisher properly?

Jobsite Walkthroughs
Regular jobsite walkthroughs can help employees assess issues onsite that can lead to a fire. Use a jobsite checklist to help guide you through areas of what to look for. Discuss your findings in team meetings and celebrate successes when you have them.

Training
Help your employees plan for what to do in the event of a fire. Cover fire safety and fire prevention during your regular safety meetings and toolbox talks. Make sure your employees know who to call and where to evacuate if a fire does occur.

For help addressing these or other safety-related hazards, please contact your local West Bend loss control representative or email losscontrol@wbmi.com.

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