We didn’t start the fire… It’s been burning since the extinguisher stopped working.

Your August Tip to Protect Workers & Reduce Fines...

Did you know that August is National Employer Safety Month? Well it’s not really, that was June. But, if you’re like me, you were about as aware of that fact as you were that June was also National Accordion Awareness Month. Sad, but true. There is no time better than the present to find ways to protect your employees while staying compliant at the same time.

Mentioning the word “fire” in our industry is about as forbidden as a baseball player reminding his pitcher that he is working on a no-hitter in the 8th inning. You just don’t do it! There are simple steps however to be compliant with your portable fire extinguishers without having to rattle the karma gods.

Fact: Failure to properly maintain portable fire extinguishers is one of the top cited safety violations in the nation. In Washington and Oregon, failure to comply with portable fire extinguisher rules ranked #6 and #5 respectfully in top 10 citations issued by L&I and OROSHA.

There are of course caveats to the rules that you should familiarize yourself with, however, the basic requirements for standard multipurpose portable fire extinguishers are that you properly:

1. Mount, locate, and identify portable fire extinguishers so employees can easily reach them, without being subjected to possible injury.

2. You must visually inspect them monthly.

3. There should be one located no more than 75 feet in either direction (for Wood, cloth, paper, rubber) or 50 feet (for Liquids, grease, gases).

4. Do yearly maintenance checks, which you keep written records of for at least 1 year.

What is required for monthly visual inspections?

You must check whether:

1. The Fire Extinguisher is in its designated place,

2. If there are any obstructions to accessing the extinguisher, and

3. That the pressure gauge reading shows that it is within operable range.

When you have portable fire extinguishers in the workplace, an employer is required to provide a general education on the location and use of the device to all employees. This means that at minimum, you must provide general principles of the fire extinguishers use and the hazards of early stage fires. No hands on training is required by OSHA, but the general education condition applies for all new hires, then yearly after that.

The asterisk... If you have chosen to designate in your emergency plan specific employees that can operate them, then you must provide specific training to them on their use.

Now is a better time than ever to make a habit of checking your fire extinguishers. Plus, doing so may save you from owing money to the government. That should be viewed as a win-win every day of the week.

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MSDS, Hold the M…

Understanding the new Globally Harmonized System (GHS)

As you may already know, Safety Data Sheets (SDS) have started to replace the Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS) as the primary source for detailed hazard information about chemical products. Why? SDSs follow a standardized format while MSDSs are permitted to take on a variety of formats. The consistent format of SDSs is expected to increase familiarity so that employees can find information with quicker success, especially in emergency situations.

Employers (including you) were required to train employees about the new standards by June 1st of last year. However, there is confusion as to what is required next. In short, starting June of this year, manufacturers and distributors should have started supplying the new SDS sheets with the materials they are sending to you and you should be keeping those records. It is okay to keep these records on a computer rather than print form as long as they are immediately accessible upon request.

Do you need to keep copies of your old MSDSs? Simple answer, yes. You should at minimum be keeping them until your current chemicals have been replaced. With that said, while you do not need to keep all of the MSDS forms, you do need to keep records of the chemicals you used for a whopping 30 years to serve as medical exposure records.

By December 1st, you need to ensure that all your chemical containers contain the new labelling. There are of course exceptions to the requirements (ex. Hardware stores who are only selling the products). You can find out answers to many of these questions on the WBMA’s new Frequently Asked Questions section on Hazardous Chemicals. Like fire extinguishers, the failure to have a written hazard communication program is one of the most frequently cited violations.

Did You Know?

WBMA now has a Compliance Made Simple Series under the Regulatory tab on our website. Just added this week are step-by-step Guides & Checklists for Safety Committee Meetings in both Oregon and Washington. Check them out here.

Quote of the month:

“In the end, all business operations can be reduced to three words: people, product and profits. Unless you’ve got a good team, you can’t do much with the other two.”

Lee Iacocca

Save the Date:

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