ESSENTIAL 29: Fire Safety

Key Takeaways:
– Learning about dangers associated with fire
– Understanding the requirements for emergency action and fire prevention plans
– Observing housekeeping guidelines for fire prevention
– Comprehending the importance of emergency exits and identify their components
– Learning the actions to take in response to emergency alarms

Course Description
Employers are required to provide a safe working environment for employees and that responsibility means having an emergency plan for responding positively to natural disasters. Readiness, through understanding of evacuation plans or drilling for regionally specific scenarios, is the key to keeping your workforce out of harm’s way.

Working safely and following proper procedures for emergency preparedness can prevent many emergency situations. However, some emergencies are out of your control.

Fire Safety
The most common workplace emergency is fire. The best way to prevent injuries and deaths from fires is to prevent fires in the first place.

According to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), more than 75,000 workplace fires and related explosions occur each year.

All companies should create a basic fire prevention plan for fire safety, which includes a list of the major workplace fire hazards and proper handling and storage procedures for those materials. The plan should also cover potential ignition sources, such as welding and smoking and related control procedures, as well as discuss the type of fire protection equipment or systems which can control a fire. The fire prevention plan must include the names

and/or regular job titles of those personnel responsible for maintenance of fire systems and those personnel responsible for control of fuel source hazards.

Dangers of fire include heat, smoke, and toxic gases which all present some very nasty consequences for the personal welfare and life safety of individuals exposed to fire.

Fire safety can include engineered controls, like fire sprinklers, fire alarms, and smoke detectors are mandatory for many modern structures and likely exist where you work.

Fire Prevention Plan
This fire safety tip is directed toward employers. Not all businesses are required to have a fire safety plan in place, but OSHA advises employers to be proactive by teaching workers about fire hazards and showing them what to do in a fire emergency.

OSHA states that if your business is required to have a fire emergency action plan in place, you must develop a plan that:

Describes the routes for workers to use and procedures to follow
Accounts for all evacuated employees
Remains available for employee review
Includes procedures for evacuating disabled employees
Addresses evacuation of employees who stay behind to shut down critical plant equipment
Includes preferred means of alerting employees to a fire emergency
Provides for an employee alarm system throughout the workplace
Requires an alarm system that includes voice communication or sound signals such as bells, whistles, or horns.
Makes the evacuation signal known to employees
Ensures emergency training (Which is what this course is about)
Requires employer review of the plan with new employees and with all employees whenever the plan is changed
Emergency Exits and Routes
In the case of a fire emergency, you want to get everyone out of the facility as quickly as possible. Emergency exits and routes are crucial because they provide a clear path to safety. Here are the qualities of effective emergency exits and routes, as

specified by OSHA:

Emergency Exits
Must be a permanent part of the building
Must be provided with a protected way of travel out of the building or out of the area
May contain way of access of passageways, stairs, aisles and stairwells, ramps, or a series exit doors
May have ways of access that lead from one area or floor to another or from one building to another
Exit Routes
Must be clear of obstructions
Must be kept free of explosive or highly flammable furnishings and other decorations
Must be wide enough to accommodate the number of people trying to get our
Must be strong enough to support their weight
Must be properly lighted and marked with EXIT signs
Alarm Systems
Alarm systems are significant because they alert all employees of a fire emergency, which is the first step in getting to safety. An alarm system may come in the form of a smoke detector, a manual pull box or even a vocal system in which employees alert others by yelling “fire” or some other specified word. If your business is using a smoke detector system the batteries should be changed once a year. When it comes to alarm systems, OSHA recommends knowing:

The locations of the manual pull boxes or other alarm systems
How to operate the alarm system
When the alarm system is to be used
What the alarm sounds like
What action to take when the alarm is sounded
Prevention
It’s great to know what to do in a fire emergency, but it’s even better to prevent the fire from happening in the first place. Electrical fires claim the lives of 280 Americans each year and injure 1,000 more. The U.S. Fire Administration (USFA) provides the following precautions to help minimize the risk of a fire:

Routinely check your electrical appliances and wiring. Replace all worn, old or damaged appliance cords immediately.
If an appliance has a three-prong plug, use it only in a three-slot outlet. Never force it to fit into a two-slot outlet or extension cord.
Keep clothes, curtains, and other items that can catch fire at least three feet from all portable electric space heaters.
Avoid putting cords where they can be damaged or pinched by furniture, under rugs and carpets, or across doorways.
Let’s not forget fire extinguishers as a key component for fire safety. Fire extinguishers put out fire by taking away one or more elements of fire.