The Texas Department of Criminal Justice
Risk Management

Safety Circular

October 2020

Fire Prevention

The TDCJ conducts Fire Safety Awareness Training every year during the month of October for its unit staff, administrative staff, and unit offenders. Thousands of people die in house or building fires yearly, and through education and practice this number can be reduced.

Most of us only think about the smoke alarms when the battery gets low and the chirping starts. Waiting to think about these things only when we need them might be too late. Do you know where your smoke alarms are located or how many you need in your home? Where is the fire extinguisher located or do you have one? Do you have an escape plan?

PREVENTION IS KEY

The best form of fire protection is prevention. Eliminating the probability of a fire reduces the chance of loss. Regular and periodic inspections can identify fire hazards and unsafe practices that may pose a threat to the safety of individuals within a specific area. Fire safety and prevention awareness is one of the most crucial components to a fire safety program. Knowing how to identify fire hazards before they result in a fire can save lives and prevent serious property damage or loss. There is little time to respond. In less than 30 seconds a small flame can get completely out of control and turn into a major fire. It only takes a minute for thick black smoke to fill a house or office area. In no time an area can be engulfed in flames. Most fires occur in the home when people are asleep. If you wake up to a fire, you will not have time to grab valuables because fires spread. There is only time to escape.

- Store flammable liquids only in approved containers.
- No open flames near flammable materials.
- Do not overload electrical circuits.
- Good housekeeping.
- Do not leave appliances in the ON position unattended.
- Store bikes, chairs, desks and other items in proper locations, and out of the point of travel, to prevent blocked exits and tripping hazards.

HAVE A PLAN

Each facility should have a site specific fire plan to address issues such as fire evacuation, fire suppression, and emergency notification. Posting evacuation routes conspicuously throughout the workplace communicates to staff and visitors evacuation routes to areas of safe refuge. Training should be conducted at least annually, in the prevention of fires, fire preparedness procedures, facility fire plans, fire evacuations, fire drill procedures, and fire suppression.

Everyone in the area must know what to do in the event of a fire in their area. A fire escape plan must be created and practiced so that everyone knows what to do. It is also very important to practice fire drills. Regardless of the cause of a fire, the area may be filled with smoke. This is a very dangerous situation and you may not be able to see very well. The smoke and toxic gases may cause dizziness and disorientation. In the confusion, one can easily become lost or trapped in a building. Everyone must understand that their safety depends upon quickly leaving the area. It has been proven that fire drills reduce chances of panic and injury in fires, and through training and being informed you have a much better chance to survive a fire. Knowing your fire escape plan can mean the difference between life and death. Be prepared to act quickly.

RESPONDING TO A FIRE

- Be familiar with fire evacuation procedures. Also familiarize yourself with the primary and secondary evacuation routes in your work area. Know the unit/ department process for obtaining emergency keys if applicable.
- Know where fire suppression equipment is located and understand how to use them in the event it is needed to assist with the evacuation process.
- Each shift/department should have a means for accounting for all persons in their respective areas.
- Have someone designated to notify local emergency response.
- Never assume an activated alarm or fire evacuation is a drill.
- Ensure everyone in your office, building, and home knows the evacuation routes and exit locations, including windows.
- Ensure everyone understands where the areas of safe refuge are located.
- Test all smoke alarms monthly to ensure that they work. Replace batteries as needed.
- Remember to get out first, then call for help. Never go back inside for anything, until the fire department has given the OK.
- Once you are out, STAY OUT, and always leave the fire fighting to professionals.

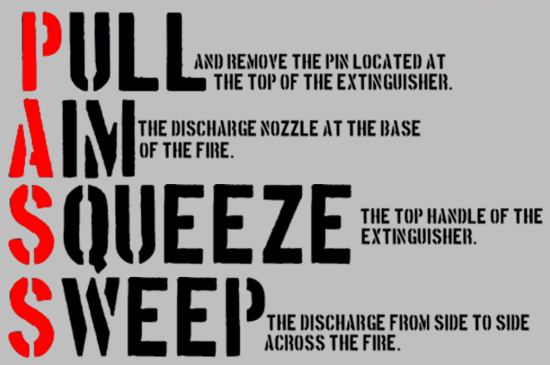
Never Go Back Inside for ANYTHING!

GUIDELINES FOR FIRE EXTINGUISHER USE

Remove fire extinguisher from mounting and call for help

Remember when you are trying to extinguish a fire, the four letter word **PASS....**

- **P**ull pin: This activates the extinguisher.
- **A**im: Hold hose and point at the base of the fire.
- **S**queeze trigger: This releases the extinguishing agent.
- **S**weep: Back and forth at the base of the fire.



PORTABLE SPACE HEATERS

Colder temperatures often prompt the use of portable space heaters. The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 101 Life Safety Code prohibits the use of portable space heaters in correctional/detention occupancies. Other administrative areas should exercise caution when using space heaters.

Purchase space heaters that have been safety tested and UL approved. Make sure the unit is equipped with an emergency tip-over shut-off feature and heating element guards. If the heater trips the breaker you must disconnect immediately. There should be a 36” radius of clearance while the heater is in use. Read and follow all of the manufacturer’s instructions for operation and care.

TYPES OF FIRES

Fires are chemical reactions that occur when fuel, oxygen, and an ignition source combine. Would you know what fire extinguisher to use?

Class A Fire: Paper, wood, cloth, etc. (solids that are not metal) where quenching by water or insulating by general purpose dry chemical is effective.

Class B Fire: Flammable liquids (gasoline, oils, or other flammable gasses) where smothering action is required.

Class C Fire: Fire in live electrical equipment (motors, switches, computers and etc.) where a nonconductive extinguishing agent is required.

Class D Fire: Fires involving metals, magnesium, potassium, sodium and sodium-potassium alloys.

Class K Fire: Designed specifically for kitchen grease fire hazards and are now required for extinguishers installed in commercial kitchens. To only be used after suppression system discharges .

PREVENTION

- Regular and periodic inspections can identify fire hazards and unsafe practices that may pose a threat to the safety of individuals within a specific area.
- Housekeeping is one of the easiest forms of fire prevention. Look to see how combustibles, or things that burn, are being stored in each area.
- Do not store materials in such a manner that would block sprinkler heads, fire suppression equipment, or emergency lighting.
- Flammable liquids should only be stored in approved containers.
- Never store combustibles inside or on top of flammable storage cabinets.
- No open flames should be produced near flammable materials. The use of candles is prohibited.
- Electrical circuits should not be overloaded. Use only appropriate 3-wire extension cords and plug them directly into an outlet. Never “piggy-back” or “daisy chain” extension cords and power strips.
- Appliances should be in the “OFF” position when unattended.

Safety Circular TDCJ Risk Management Department

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Risk Management

The Safety Circular, a publication of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice Risk Management Department, is published monthly in an effort to promote and enhance risk management awareness on issues relating to TDCJ employees. Design and layout of the Safety Circular is performed by Paul Wilder, Risk Management. Comments, suggestions and safety related items are welcome.

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References: ♦tdcj.texas.gov♦osha.gov♦nfpa.org♦RM-22♦