Fight Fire Before It Happens

10 Tips for Keeping Construction Sites Fire Free

As the heatwave continues to heat up across the United States, so does the construction business. One of the biggest threats to new projects is the potential of a construction-site fire, which can be a contractor and owner’s worst nightmare.

What follows are 10 tips for keeping construction sites free from fire, according to the International Marine Underwriters Association, which represents some 400 inland marine insurers.

1. Maintain a written loss control plan that exhaustively addresses fire exposure is critical to preventing loss. The plan should identify both general safety guidelines and specific objectives tailored to the project and should be kept as an active part of the job site management. Ideally, a specific individual should be designated responsible for on-site safety coordination.

2. Enforce a “no smoking” policy throughout the duration of the project.

3. On-site inspections by project management should be done on a daily basis, including active workspace, material storage areas, locations with high hazards, mobile construction equipment storage space and the perimeter of the project site. Documentation of these inspections should be recorded and retained for future reference.

4. Designate a second individual or “fire watch” during a “hot works” operations (cutting, welding or brazing). This person should maintain a line of sight to the “hot works” and adjacent areas, and watch for sparks, slag and products of combustion as well as inspect the area above and beyond the work. He should remain on-site and active for at least 30 minutes after operations have ceased.

5. Place portable heating equipment on noncombustive flooring or platforms, if it becomes necessary given climatic conditions. Adequate clearance, maintenance and fueling should be in accordance with manufacturer’s specifications and/or recognized standards.

6. Erect temporary enclosures in an area of the project site away from overhead exposures and which contain designated travel paths for materials and authorized emergency personnel, whenever possible. All temporary enclosures should be constructed of approved Underwriters Laboratory or Factory Mutual noncombustible construction materials.

7. Place at least one portable, properly rated and approved fire extinguisher on the roof level with sufficient capacity relative to the operation during roof construction.

8. Ensure that the proper cleaning of roof vents (lint, grease, etc.) has been conducted in order to reduce possible ignition sources prior to surfacing operations during roof construction.

9. Proper identification and labeling requirements on flammable liquid and gas containers and cylinders should be reviewed prior to acceptance on site. Safe storage areas should be designated and identified by clearly demarcated signs and surrounded by stable barriers or fencing.

10. Fire containment and suppression systems and equipment should be immediately available on the site at all times. Project management is responsible for ensuring that equipment is included in the project specifications and construction schedule, properly designed, inspected and approved, properly connected to a reliable supply and readily adaptable to local fire department equipment.

About the Author
Founded in 1930, Inland Marine Underwriters Association is the national association for the inland marine insurance industry. IMUA serves as the voice of the inland marine industry, with more than 400 member companies representing more than 90 percent of all inland marine insurers. The association provides its members with comprehensive training and educational programs, including research papers and bulletins, industry analysis, and seminars on current inland marine issues.

For More Information
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