

Flammable Material Safety

Fires destroy lives, jobs and property. Flammable materials come in various forms: solids (wood and paper), liquids (gas, thinner), and vapors (propane, butane). The primary hazard of flammable material is fire or explosion.

You can prevent fires.

TRUE STORY

When repairing grain harvesters, a mechanic climbed a wooden ladder to reach the top of the harvesters. He used a welder to repair a grain harvester receiving bin. But he didn't realize that a hot spark had lodged in the corner of the ladder rung. Upon completing the repair, he returned the ladder where it belonged--alongside other wooden ladders. Then he went home.

The ladder smoldered. The dry wood, grease and oil on the rungs (left by the mechanic's shoes) quickly ignited. As the fire intensified, flames rapidly engulfed the barn. Within 20 minutes, the whole barn was destroyed.

What could have prevented this accident?

- Use the appropriate ladder for the job task. Aluminum or fiberglass ladders are less combustible than wood.
- Wet down or remove combustible material near welding or cutting operations.

How to Prevent Fires

A fire requires heat, an ignition source, oxygen and fuel. Eliminate one of these elements and a fire cannot exist.

One of the most important ways to prevent fires is to handle and dispose of flammable materials carefully. Store them properly to minimize the potential for combustion. Read and follow product warning labels and review the material safety data sheets (MSDS), especially the section on flammability and proper storage.

EMPLOYER/EMPLOYEE RESPONSIBILITIES

Employer:

- Provide safe containers for storing flammable materials. Instruct employees in the proper storing procedures.
- Check that proper fire extinguishers are located throughout the building and premises, and inspect them regularly. Make sure they are maintained according to manufacturer's recommendations.
- Train employees to use fire extinguishers and instruct them to try to contain only small fires.

- Obtain material safety data sheets (MSDS) from product suppliers and review flammability and storage instructions with employees.
- Designate smoking and no smoking areas.
- Train employees to evacuate building and premises in case of fire.

Employee:

- Learn to use a fire extinguisher.
- Keep fuels away from open flames, sparks, and hot surfaces. Store flammable materials in a proper container.
- Keep the work area clean and free of flammable materials.
- Respond to any significant fire by sounding the alarm and evacuating the premises. Only try to extinguish the smallest fires; if you have any doubt what to do, sound the alarm and evacuate.

Zenith provides workplace safety resources at: **TheZenith.com**[®]