

Toolbox Talks 2

030: Rooms Equipped with Fire Suppression Systems

Discussion leader duties for this session:

Review any work procedures related to fire-suppressed rooms.

What this Safety Talk covers:

Special safety considerations for working in fire-suppressed rooms.

Discussion notes:

Background

Fire-suppressed rooms often use a gas to smother fire, and automatically-operated doors to contain it. Unfortunately, the gas will also smother people caught in that room when the gas is released. You may encounter fire-suppressed rooms in a wide range of settings. These include Information Technology (IT) rooms, warehouses, storage facilities, generator rooms, and various kinds of process areas.

Fire suppression system area best practices

- If lockout/tagout procedures require de-energizing the fire suppression equipment or related circuitry, get permission from the area supervisor before proceeding.
- Determine ahead of time if your work might trigger an activation signal to the fire suppression system.
- Always notify a responsible authority before entering a fire-suppressed room. In many facilities, a supervising operator is the responsible authority and maintains an entry log book. Typically, entrants must register the entry time, purpose, name of the entrant, supervisor's name, and expected exit time.
- If you arrive at a fire-suppressed room and see the door is blocked open, do not enter. Report the condition to the room supervisor and then to your foreman. Proceed only after obtaining the "all clear" from both of them.
- Do not block the doors to a fire-suppressed room, unless specifically authorized by the room supervisor. Such an action may pose serious consequences with the insurer and the Fire Marshall. Ensure the authorization is valid before proceeding.
- If another trade blocks the door open while you are working in the fire-suppressed room, stop. Point out that it's a fire suppression door. If the other trade insists that it stays open, leave the room and contact your foreman (who should then contact the area supervisor). This concerns both your personal safety and the protection of your company from liability in the event of a fire with a blocked fire door. You can work with the door open, but first ensure that condition is permitted.
- Verify that you can exit the room in an emergency. Note the location of emergency exits and emergency communications equipment.
- In a high-noise environment, you may not be able to hear the audible fire alarm. Don't work in a high-noise environment alone. Another person should be in line of sight of emergency warning lights at all times.
- If a fire breaks out in a fire suppressed room, do not attempt to extinguish it. Leave immediately.

Review and discussion

1. Whom should you notify before entering a fire-suppressed room, and why? What if there is no such designated person on the site?

2. What is a potential danger of automatically locking doors, and how should you address this?
3. Why should you not block fire suppression doors open?
4. What if you arrive at the fire-suppressed room and discover the doors are blocked open? What risks might this pose for your company?
5. If another trade blocks the door open, what should you do?
6. What things should you verify before working in a fire-suppressed room?
7. What should you do if the fire suppression alarm activates? Does the nature of your response depend on whether the alarm is a flashing light or a horn?
8. Does a high-noise environment pose an additional risk? How should you protect yourself, since you may not be able to hear an audible alarm?
9. You're working on some diesel generator controls, and the fire suppression light flashes a 30-second door closure warning. It's a small fire, and there's an extinguisher right next to you. What should you do? *[Note to Presenter: The location of fire extinguishers isn't always logical, and the fact one is in a fire-suppressed room may seem to indicate it's there to be used by any occupant of the room. But it's not. The crew must exit before the fire-suppression system closes the doors and gases the room.]*
10. A job involves rewiring a panel to accommodate some last-minute order changes. Doing this requires de-energizing the fire suppression system. The room contains several racks of lead-acid batteries. What should you do before proceeding?

Participant's Signature and Date

[illegible]