

Toolbox Talks 2

052: Unsafe Acts: Combustibles

Discussion leader duties for this session:

Review company policies related to fire prevention. Take a walk through the site and notice where combustibles are located, and be prepared to discuss what's wrong.

What this Safety Talk covers:

Most injuries occur not due to unsafe conditions, but due to unsafe acts. This Safety Talk addresses unsafe acts with combustibles.

Discussion notes:

Unsafe acts with and around combustibles

- Allowing combustibles to accumulate. On some jobs, you may be able to quickly generate a mountain of waste consisting of packing materials, product packaging, and other forms of wood, cardboard, and paper. Arrange ahead of time to have a proper waste container or disposal method on hand so you can efficiently prevent combustible material from accumulating.
- Stacking or storing waste combustibles, rather than removing them. Similar to the point just made. But an accumulation is an accumulation, even if it's neatly done.
- Stacking or storing combustibles anywhere, without allowing ample room for an egress path in the event of a fire.
- Stacking or storing combustibles higher than the sprinkler system allows for.
- Storing combustibles near energy sources. An example is storing fluorescent lamp boxes in an electrical closet (right along with transformers and panels). Another example is shipping crates stacked up just below a 480V bus in a warehouse.
- Using an ignition source (e.g., a welder) where combustibles are stored or stacked without removing the combustibles or creating a barrier between them and the ignition source.
- Using portable heaters with combustibles present. Keep combustibles a safe distance from the heater.
- Using scrap combustible materials to build a makeshift shelter. Only use approved methods and materials for erecting any kind of shelter.
- Working above combustibles without providing for egress. This situation can arise when you are working on a grated floor that is above another floor where combustibles are located, for example. It can also arise when you are working on a single-access mezzanine, ladder, scissor lift, or other elevated point from which the only exit is back through combustibles. Plan ahead so you aren't trapped.
- Working above combustibles without considering flame height or blast. Similar to the previous point, except the issue is that the flame or intense heat could reach you before you have time to get to safety. In these cases, a plan for not getting trapped isn't enough. Other possible precautions include having a firewatch attendant, erecting barriers between the work area and the combustibles, removing the combustibles, wearing special PPE, removing ignition sources, and lockout/tagout of adjacent equipment.

Review and discussion

1. Why should you not allow combustibles to accumulate?
2. What are some combustibles you can generate while you are working?
3. Does neatly stacking combustibles prevent a fire hazard?

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