

Fire Safety Advice: Manufacturing Facilities



The impact and cost of fire in a manufacturing facility should not be underestimated. A fire incident can result in significant staff injuries, fatalities and costly damage that may mean the end of a business.

Machines are typically custom built to produce very specific products. If damaged or destroyed in a fire, they may take months or even years to rebuild, resulting in significant down time and lost revenues.

It is vital that manufacturers understand and invest in adequate fire protection solutions. Wormald offers the following fire safety recommendations:

1. Establish responsibility for fire safety. Generally, under Workplace Health and Safety (WHS) legislation, officers must ensure that the business meets its WHS obligations and can be held personally liable for failing to do so. It is important that clear systems are established for the management of fire safety, including exercising due diligence to ensure appropriate policies, procedures, safety practices and resources are in place.

As more manufactures undertake rationalisation and centralisation programs, responsibility for fire protection may shift from plant managers to category managers or procurement personnel. If responsibility is shared, the parameters for each manager should be clearly communicated and defined.

2. Understand legislative and regulatory requirements. Fire safety is heavily regulated and it is the responsibility of every manufacturer to comply with appropriate legislation and Australian Standards. The national building code, Australian Standards, the principal set of WHS regulations in each state and state and territory legislation governing the maintenance of fire protection systems are central to fire safety.

Typically, these documents stipulate that the person in control of a workplace, business or undertaking is responsible for ensuring that fire and explosion risks are minimised, appropriate fire protection is available and regular maintenance is conducted.

3. Conduct a thorough risk assessment. A detailed understanding of fire risks and hazards can help to minimise fire and explosion risks and identify a suitable fire protection solution. The most common fire risks in manufacturing are machinery, stock or parts stored on site or in warehouses, and the manufacturing process (for example, the use of heat or hazardous gases).

4. Install an adequate fire protection solution. A range of fire protection solutions are available for manufacturing sites, including basic fire extinguishers, water spray deluge systems, gas systems and foam systems. It is important to install a solution that meets the specific requirements of the site. When deciding on a solution, some key considerations include the materials being used, size of the site, number of staff and legislative, regulatory and any insurance requirements that apply to the manufacturer's particular circumstances.

5. Regularly audit, inspect and maintain fire protection equipment. A high level of reliability is essential when it comes to fire protection. Fire protection systems and equipment should perform to the standard to which they were originally designed and installed. Regular testing can validate the functionality of the systems and equipment and help to uncover any faults or issues that may cause malfunction. *Australian Standard AS1851 - 2012 - Routine service of fire protection systems and equipment* recommends that fire protection systems be regularly tested, serviced and maintained.

6. Regularly re-visit training and emergency response processes. A confident team that is able to respond appropriately in the event of a fire is an invaluable investment and can substantially reduce the impact of a crisis. Emergency evacuation procedures should be regularly reviewed, and everyone working in a manufacturing facility should be trained on how to respond appropriately to a fire incident and use fire protection equipment correctly. This includes briefing new employees and regularly conducting refresher training for existing staff.



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