

NEWSLETTER

FIRE SAFETY! FIRE PREVENTION!

AN INSIGHT INTO COMMUNITY
RISK REDUCTION

On Sunday June 21st, 2023, CARICOM countries joined their South American neighbour in mourning after a major fire in a secondary school dormitory in Mahdia, Guyana claimed the lives of 18 students and a five-year-old boy, and injured many others. The dormitory fire superseded what was considered the country's deadliest fire in 2016, when 17 inmates were killed at the main Georgetown prison (Kaieteur News-4:3:16).

Whether fires are intentionally lit or the cause of another source, as a society, we must learn from these tragedies and implement ways to prevent similar incidents. There is certainly no one-size fits all when it comes to fire safety and prevention, because industrial establishments and private residential's security and safety are measured according to the different types of risk. However, there are basic safety requirements, persons in the community are expected to practice, regardless of class or status.

Importance of Fire Safety Codes

Firstly, it is imperative, companies follow the international codes that are widely used. The codes are usually governed by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) and the International Code Council (ICC) building codes. The NFPA carries codes for gas lines, life safety training, fire extinguishers and hose reels, to name a few. The ICC codes are used for the construction of supermarkets, hospitals and hotels and to indicate how to separate rooms/stairwells. The type of codes used all depends on the risk persons would be exposed too.

As it relates to the density factor, whether you are standing or sitting, the NFPA code will give a matrix as to how much persons should occupy a space. Additionally, rooms ought to be equipped with fire extinguishers and smoke alarms, and in the case of apartments, a fire escape. This is also applicable to elderly and children's homes. It is important to assess the risk, then apply codes suitable to the risk.

Requirements for a Fire Certificate

The type of business you are operating, your environment and the possible risk these could present, will determine the type of fire certificate needed. In accordance with the Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) act, once there is more than one person employed in an industrial establishment above ground floor, or if there are more than 20 persons working in the building, the company is required to be fire certified. Furthermore, if an organization stores highly flammable processes, like alcohol, petrol, solvents, cleaning agents and chemicals, a fire certificate is a must-have. Lastly, safety and security will not be effective, if there is no emergency response plan. No matter the size of the organization, a crisis emergency response plan must be implemented and tested periodically for gaps and improvement.

Safety officers are usually assigned to lead and assist with response plans. For e.g, it is recommended that emergency response drills in schools, be done biannually or annually. For high-risk environment like plants, oil rigs and the Petro-chemical industry, safety drills are done often and key information is documented.

Fire safety and fire prevention is everyone's business and we should all make an effort to engage in community risk reduction because it will make the fire service and organizations more efficient and effective in saving lives and property.

Fire Triangle



Three things you need to have in its right proportion to ignite a fire:

1. Fuel- This can be anything from liquid to solid form. For e.g. Gas, kerosene, wood carpet, cloth, paper, curtain. They all have different ignition temperatures and will determine the type of extinguisher you need. Each fuel is classified by a class...Class A (organic material (cloth, paper, wood). Class B-Liquids, whether flammable or combustible, includes, kerosene, paints and tinnars. Class C, can be electrical or energized equipment. Class D (metal, magnesium, titanium) & Class K (kitchen, animal fats & oils).

2. Oxygen- It is in the atmosphere, always existing.

3. Heat source- The energy required to carry temperature outwards.

In conclusion, you can look at heat sources in your home and manage your risk. Understanding the fuels, will also help you identify the type of fire extinguisher you need. E.g Water extinguisher-Class A. Dry Chemicals- Class A, B, & C; carbon dioxide for chemicals; Wet chemicals extinguisher is used for restaurants. Let us work together to proactively reduce the risk of fire in our communities, prevent deaths and injuries.

