

Three Steps to Jobsite Fire Safety

Contractors are responsible for developing fire prevention and fire protection programs on their job sites. While fires on construction sites are not common, they still happen. Most fires are small and localized in nature, but without the proper precautions they can cause significant damage and even loss of life. Researchers at National Fire Protection Association recently reported the annual losses from construction site fires annually exceed \$280 million in direct property damage. The NFPA does not include the costs incurred by contractor such as lost wages due to delays, and damages to material and equipment.

Contractors routinely rely on portable fire extinguishers as their first line of defense in their protection and prevention programs. The National Fire Protection Association supports this decision as they advise that portable fire extinguishers can save lives and mitigate property damage by putting out fires or containing it until the fire department can arrive. With the proper investment, contractors can protect their jobsites and employees.

OSHA allows portable extinguishers on construction sites, and provides very clear requirements for their use in prevention and protection in their regulations. When contractors fail to comply with these rules, OSHA may apply fines and exposure to further judicial actions. These OSHA Safety and Health Regulations are outlined in 1926 Subpart F- [Fire Protection](#) and [Prevention](#).

In very general terms, contractors should take three simple steps to update the fire prevention aspect of their safety procedures.

Step 1

Alert workers of potential fire hazard areas

Contractors must alert their workers of the potential dangers from fire. Superintendents routinely conduct a jobsite walk-through to check that all potential fire hazards are clearly marked. OSHA rule 1926.151(a)(3) clearly states the contractors must enforce rules that prohibit smoking and ignition sources in the vicinity of operations which constitute a fire hazard. Contractors must conspicuously post: "No Smoking or Open Flame." Proper signage includes not only identifying potential danger zones, but also the location of fire extinguishers.

This includes areas of construction debris, flammable solvent storage, and lumber storage. Additional common construction sources of fire are damaged electrical extension cords, frayed cables, and over-loaded circuits.

Contractors should document their proactive actions through photographs and inspection reports.

Step 2

Labeling Fire Extinguishers Locations

After identifying and labeling all potential fire dangers, contractors must identify where adequate fire extinguishing is located for their crews. **OSHA rule 1926.151(c)(6) states that** Portable fire extinguishing equipment, suitable for the fire hazard involved, shall be provided at convenient, conspicuously accessible locations in the yard area. Portable fire extinguishers, rated not less than 2A, shall be placed so that maximum travel distance to the nearest unit shall not exceed 100 feet.

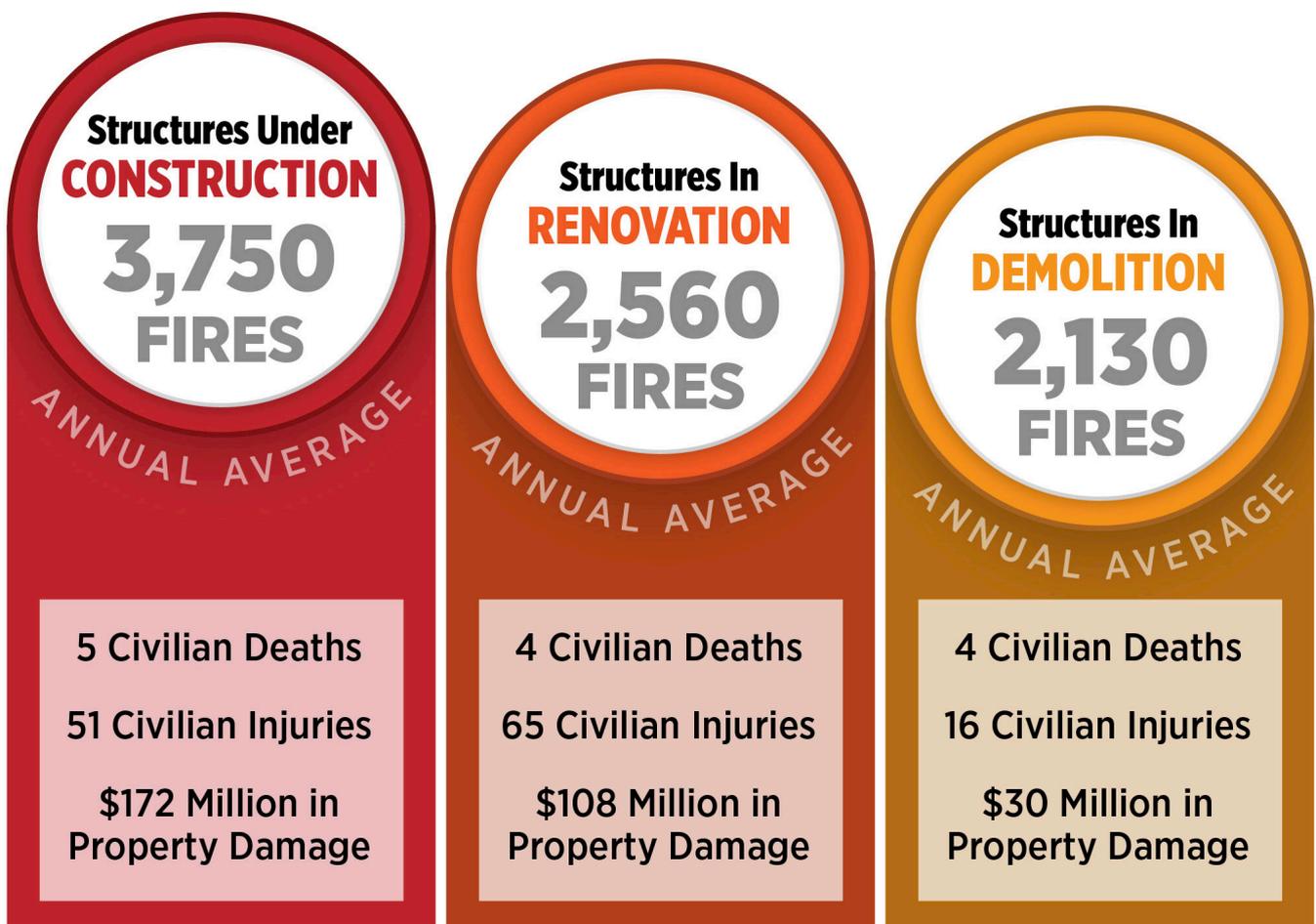
Step 3

Routine Inspection and training

OHSA 1926.150(c)(1)(vii) states that contractors must periodically inspect and maintain their portable fire extinguishers. Contractors must develop inspection procedures in accordance to the rules established by the NFPA. Key aspects of the NFPA procedures include:

- Monthly inspections of each extinguisher that is documented with a record of the inspection and any action taken.
- Using tags attached to each unit that the dates of each inspection.
- An annual maintenance inspection of each extinguisher that can include hydrostatic tests.
- And the removal of dry type fire extinguishers that have exceeded their designed service life.

2010 through 2014 Construction-Related Fire Annual Averages



digging deeper

Check out these links for more information on fire safety:

<https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/firesafety/index.html>

BACK TO SAFETY TOOLBOX TALKS



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