



JOEY BARROSO

Why Fire Safety Knowledge is Crucial

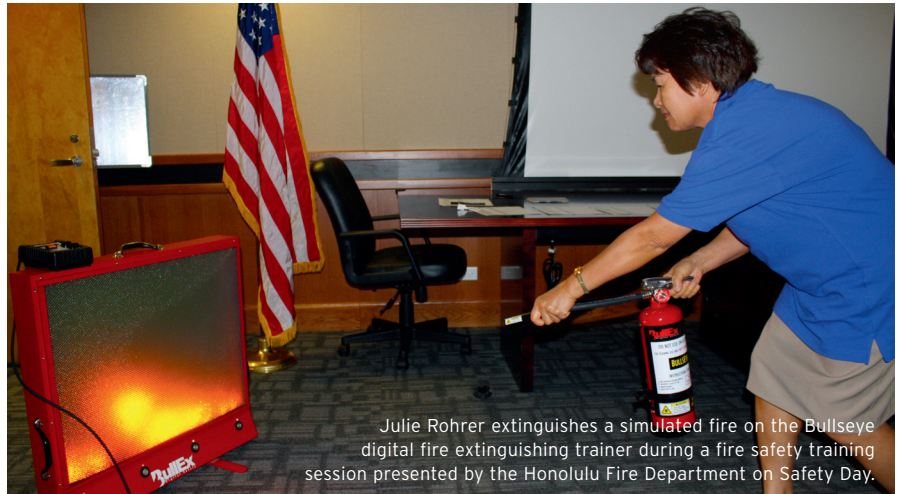
Managers are responsible for fire education and prevention, and staff training

Fire education, fire-prevention plan and fire training continue to be essential as these threats are heightened by climate changes, aging structures and unforeseen human behaviors. Fires can bring about property damage, but without proper fire safety knowledge, fires can cause injuries or even death.

According to the U.S. Fire Administration (USFA), an entity of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), residential is the leading property type for fire deaths (75.0%), fire injuries (77.1%), and fire dollar loss (43.3%) in 2018. Residential building fire causes in 2018 were at an estimated 379,600 fires in the United States. The top four causes were cooking, followed by heating, unintentional or carelessness, and electrical malfunction.

A building can burn down in minutes if your structure is not up to code and your fire prevention systems are not fully functioning. Neglecting to have a fire prevention plan in place can lead to disastrous consequences and major financial setbacks. Minimizing the chances of injuries or death by developing or reviewing your building's plan today is vital. No matter your business size or residential structure, building management should be highly acute to the following:

- **Understand the fire hazards:** Recognizing potential fire hazards is the first step in creating a fire prevention plan. Fires can break out with various heat sources and something that will burn. If enough heat is present, pretty much anything can catch on fire.
- **Staff training:** After locating your fire hazards, train your staff. Employee training plays a key role in both preventing a fire and responding



Julie Rohrer extinguishes a simulated fire on the Bullseye digital fire extinguishing trainer during a fire safety training session presented by the Honolulu Fire Department on Safety Day.

Photo Courtesy HonoluluDistrict_Flickr

to a fire. Ensure everyone knows how to spot a fire hazard and what to do if flames break out. A clearly marked escape route can be the difference between life and death.

- **Preventative measures:** Your building is expected to have the correct number of fire extinguishers and/or a working sprinkler system due to fire safety regulations. Sprinklers and extinguishers should be inspected regularly. Check the service tag on your extinguisher to know when it was serviced and when to replace. You may also need to lean on a safety or risk consultant to walk through your property and point out fire hazards you may have become oblivious to in your day-to-day operations.

- **Response to a fire:** Seconds can mean survival or death, so the response plan should address what to do in case a fire does occur on your property. Fire evacuation assignments, fire drills, fire evacuation procedures, and where employees should go after exiting the building should all be reviewed.

Crafting a Fire Prevention Plan

The Occupational Safety and Health

Administration (OSHA) and other regulatory agencies require fire prevention plans, so ensure yours is in writing and communicated to your employees. OSHA requires your written plan to be kept in the workplace and be made available to employees for review, although an employer with 10 or fewer employees may communicate the plan orally. At a minimum, your fire prevention plan should include:

- **Identify Hazards:** The plan should begin with a list of all major fire hazards and their location. It should also outline proper handling and storage procedures for hazardous materials, potential ignition sources and their control, and the type of fire protection equipment necessary to control each major hazard. This includes storage of hazardous materials, potential ignition sources and areas where fires may have occurred previously. Point out fire suppression options near known fire risks which will determine the suppression method.

- **Equipment Maintenance:** Equipment is often the largest fire hazard under your roof. Your fire prevention plan must include care and maintenance of

heat-producing equipment to keep it from accidentally igniting combustible materials. List safeguards for keeping equipment safe and indicate the fire suppression solution nearby. If equipment is unsafe to use, prepare a backup plan to take dangerous equipment out of service.

Outline Procedures: Set up protocols or use checklists to help control accumulations of flammable and combustible waste materials, as well as regular maintenance of safeguards installed on heat-producing equipment to prevent the accidental ignition of combustible materials. Based on what you do, you will need a plan on how to handle hazardous materials. Reduce risk by controlling their accumulation and proper disposal with routines for disposing of items or rendering them less flammable or hazardous.

Hazard Controls: Designate employees and supervisors responsible for maintaining equipment to prevent or control sources of ignition, fuel source hazards or fires. Centralize the hazard controls to help narrow responsibility

if something should happen. A clear reporting plan for employees to inform supervisors of any close calls will ensure everyone complies with the procedures to mitigate fires.

Training: Conducting planned safety meetings will support compliance by employees which may include fire evacuation drills or fire extinguisher training. OSHA prevents employees from using fire extinguishers until they have had appropriate training. An employer also must inform employees when hired, then annually, of the potential exposure to fire hazards and review the parts of the fire prevention plan necessary for self-protection. The most important points to teach employees include:

- Fire breaks out versus hearing the fire alarm
- Escape routes and fire exits
- Sounding the fire alarm
- Calling 911
- Evacuation, especially those with mobility issues
- Extinguishers and other useful equipment

- Other safety procedures

As a building manager or owner, it is your job to make sure your employees and customers are safe in the event of fire. This means you might need to manage the situation during an exceedingly demanding, panic-filled time to call the shots and immediately start to delegate responsibilities. While no two fires are alike, a good system coupled with a few people willing to step up as leaders can help keep everyone involved safe. The better trained your employees are, the less likely your business will suffer devastating consequences. ❖

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