



## ORGANISING FIRE DEFENCE



It is desirable that a company formulates a written plan which will spell out its intention to prevent fires and effectively deal with the consequences should the prevention strategy fail for whatever reason. A written plan will serve as a continuous reference document ensuring continuity, delegating responsibility and requiring positive action.

### Management role

Without exception, even the most enthusiastic commitment towards initiating and maintaining a fire defence system will fail without the initial involvement and continued support of top management. This factor alone shows the importance of the fire defence programme. It gains status and authority which nobody can gainsay.

Having made a “statement of intent” and established the accountability required within the system, the managing director need not be concerned with the day-to-day routine of making the system work. A prerequisite, however, remains the continued interest that is shown.

### Initiating the system

A policy statement should be formulated which will motivate the necessity for the fire defence system, define responsibilities, establish objects and explain its structure. This directive is then signed by the managing director and its contents made known to all employees, leaving no doubt that it will be implemented and is designed to address both personal safety and property conservation. It is expected that company magazines,



bulletins, notices and meetings would all be used to inform staff of the company commitment.



A policy statement will, of necessity, address unique circumstances but could include the following:

- references to statistics as a motivation factor for the new/revised fire defence system
- a brief outline of the line management structure which clearly indicates accountability
- endorses management support and involvement
- appeals to all employees for co-operation with an indication that their support is in effect expected

### **Plant fire officer**

Whatever designation is used, one person must be detailed to manage the fire defence system – we use the term plant fire officer. At the outset it would be prudent to discuss each department's requirements with its controlling officers. This results in practical procedures being instituted and their active, continued involvement.

Each department will define a responsibility chain, inspection procedure, training schedule and emergency procedure suited to specific needs. Guidelines for preparing these criteria could be as follows:

- involvement of everyone – to a greater or lesser degree – with the appropriate chain of responsibility. This promotes continuity
- a fire defence plan must not exclude any location or process since an outdoor fire could be just as damaging as one indoors
- inspections are the monitoring function of the system and will reveal short-comings and lead to reviews and useful modifications where necessary
- employees will respond more favourably if the fire defence plan addresses them personally. Try to present fire safety as a tool to safe-guard their lives and occupations, otherwise they tend to concentrate only on the job at hand, which could range from production to maintenance.
- The plan must be followed scrupulously or the objectives will not be reached. Training, inspections, etc must not be put off for any reason.

### **Responsibilities**

When compiling the system, responsibilities need clear definition to obviate conflicting interests and duplication.

Managing director – ensure continuing support and requires progress reports.

Managers – responsible for their divisions' co-operation and performance and report to managing director.

Supervisors and foremen – their actions and example set the tone in their departments, they have a monitoring function and report to managers.

Loss control committee – the vehicle for assisting departments and monitoring progress. It issues material and information needed for promoting fire safety, compiles a fire safety record and reports to management.

Plant fire officer – has the overall function of managing the fire defence system, is an integral part of the loss control committee and reports to management and the managing director in the event of dispute or serious breakdown of the fire defence system.



## Training

Newly employed, transferred or promoted personnel must be fully instructed as to their role within the system.

Supervisory staff should hold regular meetings with their staff and managers should attend these meetings periodically. This facilitates the exchange of ideas, improvements in the system and reinforces its importance.

Of great importance is that people become fully informed of the fire defence policy, its successes and failures in order for it to be effective. As much effort should be expended in merchandising the system to employees as in promoting the products a company manufactures. The advantages to all are clearly worth attaining for employees and businesses alike.



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