

Press Release

Department of Labor and Employment
Bureau of Working Conditions
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ESTABLISHMENT TOLD: “DON’T BE FIRED UP”

Fire safety is everyone's responsibility. The spate of fire that hit various establishments in the country recently necessitates the importance of emergency preparedness workplaces must implement.

Fire presents significant risk to businesses. It can kill or seriously injure employees or visitors and can damage or destroy buildings, equipment and stock. Businesses operating from the same building are particularly vulnerable because they don't have control over the fire safety of other similarly situated establishments and because of their location as some are situated at the top-most portion of the building where evacuation in cases of fire maybe difficult. Loss of premises may completely disrupt their operations. Many businesses fail to continue trading following a severe fire.

Fire may have a more significant impact on businesses that (1) stock combustible materials including flammable liquids or gases; (2) use heat processes; (3) have people working alone in parts of the buildings; (4) have poorly maintained equipment or electrical circuits;(5) have public access (i.e. are at risk from arson); and (6) have poor housekeeping standards.

However, any organization may be affected at any time. Thus, RA 9514 otherwise known as Fire Code of the Philippines emphasized the importance of compliance to its provisions in the prevention, mitigation and response to fire incidents. Under the legislation, those who are responsible for premises, including owners, employers, managers, employees and others occupying non-domestic premises must manage fire safety on those premises.

Those responsible should (1) Take steps to prevent and reduce the impact of fire on the workplace and carry out a fire risk assessment of their workplace; (2) Identify the significant findings of the risk assessment and the details of anyone who might be especially at risk in case of fire and institute control measures; (3) Provide and maintain fire precautions necessary to safeguard anyone using the workplace

(including visitors); (4) Provide information, instruction and training to employees about the fire precautions in the workplace.

Additionally, establishments must form emergency response team, fire-fighting team, evacuation team, safety, security and medical response team which will conduct periodic drills and hazard identification. Employers must inform other employers who also have workplaces in the building of any significant risks they found which might affect the safety of their employees – and cooperate with them about the measures proposed to reduce/control those risks. They must establish a suitable means of contacting the emergency services and ensure that they can be called easily. They should ensure that the emergency services can gain access to the premises in an emergency. Employers must also make sure that the alarm system, fire extinguisher, sprinkler system and other fire fighting equipment are in good condition and are properly maintained. Employees must co-operate with employers to ensure the workplace is safe from fire and its effects and not to do anything which will place themselves or other people at risk. Ensure existing means of detection to discover a fire quickly enough to raise an alarm in time for all the occupants to escape to a safe place as well as enough exits and that they are in the right places. The type and size of exits should be suitable and sufficient for the number of people likely to need to use them. All escape routes must be easily identifiable, free from any obstructions and adequately illuminated. Means of escape arrangements should be included in the emergency plan. Part of the emergency plan is to ensure that there are assigned people in the evacuation of PWDs, elderly, young children and pregnant women.

And lastly, the Bureau of Working Conditions (BWC) underscores the importance of forming a Joint Safety and Health Committee as provided in Rule 1040 of the Occupational Safety and Health Standards that will collectively coordinate all efforts in fire prevention, mitigation and response of all building occupants.

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