

### Working Safely with Fire

October is fire prevention month.. Fires can occur almost anywhere at any time, even in the workplace. In 2019, The U.S. Fire Administration and FEMA recorded 18,700 office and store fires in the United States resulting in 744 million in property damage. The most common cause of fire was cooking, but other causes, such as carelessness and electrical fires also contributed. It is important to prevent fires in the workplace because these fires lead to not only property damage and loss of work, but loss of life.

The University has a history of workplace fires. The causes have varied including cooking mishaps, equipment malfunctions, incidents with open flames and welding, cutting and brazing (hot work) activities. Hot work is a unique challenge because a flame or spark is required in order to perform the work. According to the National Fire Protection Agency (NFPA), U.S. fire departments responded to an average of 4,580 structure fires involving hot work per year in 2014–2018. These fires caused an average of 22 civilian deaths, 171 civilian injuries, and \$484 million in direct property damage per year. Northwestern University established a [Welding, Cutting, and Brazing \(Hot Work\) Program](#) designed to reduce the incidence of these types of fires that result in property damage or injury.



**Fire Safety**  
Stay Aware & Stay Safe



### Fire Safety at Work

Consider these tips for staying safe and preventing fires at work

#### 1. Work Safely using the Hot Work Program

- When performing hot work always follow the University Hot Work program.
- Make sure to complete and follow the Hot Work permit requirements.
- Contractors are required to follow Northwestern's hot work program and must coordinate with NU Facilities to ensure proper hot work protocols are followed.

#### 2. Ensure Proper Storage and Disposal

- Flammable materials, such as oily rags can self combust if not disposed of or stored properly.
- Store all hazardous materials in a dry/fire resistant room or cabinet. Ensure proper ventilation.

#### 3. Practice Good Housekeeping and Equipment Maintenance

- Maintaining a clean work area prevents clutter (i.e. paper, boxes, unused equipment) from allowing a fire to spread faster. Keeping a clutter-free workspace also ensures clear exits.
- Perform proper periodic maintenance on machinery and equipment to prevent equipment malfunctions that could lead to a fire.

Learn more: Complete [fire extinguisher training](#) or view our fire prevention program [HERE](#)

Report all injuries on the Risk Management [website](#) or 847.491.5084.

### Tips for Success When Talking to Your Team

**Preparation is Key:** Keep the topic relevant. Work with your team to review the various ways to improve ergonomics in your work place.

**Stay Positive:** Keep the focus on what can be done to create a safe workplace, instead of focusing on what has gone wrong in the past.

**Share a Story, Ask for a Story:** Storytelling is a powerful method to convey information. Stories from your employees make the topic even more relatable.

### Safety at Home

Practice fire safety at home with some of the following:

- Make sure your home has smoke alarms and that they are operational. Test them periodically.
- Do not leave your kitchen when cooking. Food and oils can overheat and start a fire if you are not present.
- Have your heating sources inspected. Water heater, furnace/boiler/dryers should all be inspected regularly.
- Keep a dry powder extinguisher in your house. If a fire does occur, you can use the extinguisher to stop a fire before it gets out of control.
- Use caution with candles, never leave a room with lit candles. Ensure there are not curtains or combustible materials such as paper around candles.

### For Additional Information

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