

Risk Control Guide

# SMOKING REGULATIONS

## Introduction

Inadequately controlled smoking is a leading cause of fires. In order to prevent accidental fires, smoking must be controlled where combustible, flammable or explosive materials are or could be present. To limit this risk, management must develop a viable and enforceable smoking policy. This policy should limit smoking to areas of the facility where it can be properly supervised and where combustible or hazardous materials are not present in sufficient quantities to cause a large fire or explosion.

## Loss Examples

A fire attributed to carelessly discarded smoking materials started in a toy factory near Bangkok, Thailand. The fire quickly spread throughout the building and caused collapse of the structure within 20 minutes. This fire resulted in the deaths of 188 workers and injuries to 469. One worker was later convicted of causing the fire by careless smoking and received a prison sentence of 10 years.

## Smoking Policy

A smoking policy should include the following:

- A document that mandates that smoking is permitted only in designated safe areas.
- Senior management support and endorsement for the policy.
- Competent personnel to implement and enforce the policy.
- The policy should be effectively communicated to contractors and employees.
- The policy should stipulate specific penalties for non-compliance.
- “No smoking” signs should be posted.
- Routine fire safety inspections should be conducted to assure compliance.
- Designated safe areas should be identified.
- The policy should be periodically reviewed and improved as needed.

Because smoking is a well-known health hazard, many national and local governments have passed laws requiring totally smoke-free work environments. As the smoking habit is difficult to control, some people will smoke, whether prohibited or not. The problem can be made worse where there is a total ban on smoking, as the lack of designated smoking areas may increase the potential for fires by driving smokers “underground”, to smoke in unsuitable areas where proper receptacles for smoking materials are not available. For this reason, a smoking policy should be developed, even if laws dictate a non-smoking workplace.

People tend to observe rules and policies that they understand. For this reason, employee participation in the development of a smoking policy will help gain their approval and support and will help to ensure the ultimate success of the programme. Likewise, senior management must demonstrate support of the policy if it is to be credible. The policy should be written so as to be easily understood and should be posted in a conspicuous place. It should clearly indicate areas where smoking is permitted and where it is prohibited. Smoking should be prohibited in hazardous areas where explosives, flammable gases, flammable liquids, or combustible dusts are present. Smoking should also be prohibited in areas with combustible storage, occupancy, or construction.

“Match check” stations can be set up to provide places for employees to discard lighters and matches before entering buildings or the site. Reasonably adverse conditions such as wind gust, ventilation failure, or a flammable liquid spill should be anticipated.

Provide clear signage designating “No-smoking” and “Smoking” zones. Clearly communicate the policy, the reasons for the policy, and the penalties associated with non-compliance to all employees and visitors. Assign only competent and respected personnel to enforce the regulations.

Periodically review the smoking policy and look for ways to improve it. Routinely evaluate changes in occupancy, production methods, and any violations found during routine fire safety inspections.

## Designated Smoking Areas

Smoking should only be allowed in safe areas that have been approved by management after considering the following:

- Adequate smoking receptacles and disposal arrangements.
- Non-combustible construction and occupancy.
- Non-combustible furniture.
- No storage in the smoking area or within 6 metres of the smoking area.
- Automatic fire protection and/or detection systems.
- Portable fire extinguishers.
- Posted copy of the written smoking policy.

Best practice would involve the use of a safe **external** covered area sited well clear of any buildings, utilities or external yard storage areas. This level of control will often be enforced by country specific legislation. If such legislation still allows for smoking inside buildings, designated smoking rooms/enclosures should be within outbuildings or areas not presenting a significant risk of fire spread to the main facilities.

Any designated smoking room, or larger area that is judged to be safe, should be free of extraneous and easily ignited combustibles and must be provided with proper non-combustible receptacles for smoking materials. The room or area should be of non-combustible construction, ideally be protected by fire protection and/or detection systems, and should always be provided with ample portable fire extinguishers. The smoking policy should be posted in a place where it is likely to be read.

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