

Pre-planning with the Fire Department

A lack of knowledge can be a dangerous thing, especially at the site of a fire. A good fire department preplan can help give the fire department the tools it needs to fight a fire in your facility without losing valuable time looking for sprinkler system control valves and fire department connections, or evaluating the contents or internal layout of the building.

The following information provides a summary of the steps to consider when establishing a pre-fire plan with the fire department. It is designed to assist you in setting up a fire preplan with your local fire department. Care should be taken to ensure the preplan you create is comprehensive and specific to your facility.

What is Pre-fire Planning?

Pre-fire planning should be completed in consultation with the persons who will be involved in the implementation of the plan. To be effective, a pre-fire plan must be developed jointly with the fire department. A pre-fire plan has two major objectives:

- To identify potential fire problems within a building
- Make firefighters aware of potential problems so they can develop appropriate action plans in the event of a fire

Developing a Pre-fire Plan

The following items should be part of your pre-fire planning with local fire department officials:

- If available, obtain a copy of the building plans. These plans contain valuable information on the construction and layout of the building, operations throughout the property and fire protection information. If no such plans are available, create a building diagram for use by the fire department.
- Jointly determine the best access routes to the various parts of the building.
- Review the occupancy and operations throughout the building and storage of contents. Special consideration must be given to areas with flammable liquids, plastics, highly combustible contents or other areas needing special firefighting consideration.
- Review the location(s) of sprinkler system control valves. In some cases, additional signs may be needed to aid firefighters in finding these areas in the event of a fire. A review of the sprinkler system(s) should be conducted to ensure the fire department knows how effective the sprinkler system(s) will be in the event of a fire. This is especially important in older buildings, or where there has been a change in operations or occupancy since the building was constructed.
- Review the location of the fire department connections (wye connection, dry riser connections, etc.) and make sure firefighters have clear access. Confirm that one of the first fire department

pumps to arrive on site will be assigned to boost the water supply to the sprinklers via the fire department connection.

- Review water supply sources and hydrant locations. Plan how the fire department will use water for hoses without depleting the sprinkler system water supply.
- Review fire pumps, if any, and other fire protection equipment located in the building. Determine type of equipment, location, arrangement, and activation methods (automatic or manual).
- Know how the fire alarm is activated and where the signal is transmitted. Make sure the monitoring company has a written plan for who to contact for different types of alarms (e.g. sprinkler system water flow alarms vs. tamper alarms). Determine alternative fire department notification procedures if the alarm system should malfunction.
- Establish procedures for notifying the fire department when the sprinkler system, or other fire protection systems, are out of service.
- Establish procedures for managing planned and unplanned fire protection system impairments.
- Assign responsibilities to key individuals to maintain fire protection equipment, maintain the pre-fire plan and respond in the event of a fire or other emergency. Identify who will work with the fire department when it arrives on site. This individual needs to be able to answer questions during the fire emergency.
- Schedule periodic fire department visits to update information and walk through the building.

Periodic Review and Update

The pre-fire plan should be thoroughly reviewed at least annually. Any changes in operations, occupancy or the construction and layout of the buildings should be noted. A new building diagram may need to be provided to the fire department.

The fire department should be invited to tour the building as part of the annual pre-fire plan review. Any items that need to be updated on the plan should be thoroughly communicated to everyone involved.

Conclusion

The fire department is your partner in the event of a fire. A well-designed pre-fire plan can help prevent a small fire from turning into a disaster. Established procedures, fire department site inspections, practiced emergencies and ongoing communications can help to increase the effectiveness of the fire department and reduce the potential fire loss.