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Safety Tip of the Month

Flammable Materials: Know the Risks

Before flammable materials can be safely managed, workers must understand the hazards associated with handling them. Primary risks include:

1. Fire and Explosion Hazards

Flammable materials can ignite when exposed to open flames, sparks, heat, or static electricity. Fires can spread rapidly, causing extensive property damage, serious injuries, or death. The 2010 Deepwater Horizon disaster demonstrated the devastating consequences of uncontrolled flammable materials, resulting in an explosion that killed 11 workers and caused significant environmental damage.

2. Health Hazards

Many flammable materials also pose serious health risks. Inhaling chemical vapors or allowing chemicals to contact the skin can cause respiratory problems, irritation, or long-term health effects. Workers must understand both the fire hazards and potential health effects of the materials they handle.

3. Environmental Hazards

Spills and leaks caused by improper handling can contaminate soil and groundwater, harming ecosystems and drinking water supplies. Following environmental regulations and proper handling procedures helps prevent releases and minimize their impact.



Handle Flammables With Care

Safety Tips for Working with Flammable Liquids

Flammable liquids are common in many workplaces, but improper handling can create serious fire and explosion hazards. Gasoline, paint thinner, acetone, alcohol, and other solvents can release vapors that ignite when exposed to sparks, hot surfaces, or open flames.



Work Safely With Flammable Liquids

- **Store them properly** — Use approved, labeled containers and designated flammable-material storage cabinets.
- **Control ignition sources** — Keep liquids away from welding, flames, heaters, smoking areas, and spark-producing equipment.
- **Limit quantities** — Bring only what is needed into the work area and return unused material to proper storage.
- **Provide ventilation** — Work in well-ventilated areas to prevent invisible vapors from accumulating.
- **Close containers** — Secure lids immediately after use to reduce vapors and prevent spills.
- **Respond to spills** — Follow facility procedures and properly dispose of cleanup materials.
- **Wear proper protection** — Use the personal protective equipment listed on the product’s safety data sheet.

Empty Does Not Mean Safe

“Empty” containers may still hold flammable residue and vapors that can ignite or explode. Never expose them to heat, sparks, cutting, or welding. Treat empty containers like full ones until authorized personnel properly clean or dispose of them.

Before Starting, Check:

- Is the container approved, labeled, and undamaged?
- Are ignition sources controlled?
- Am I wearing the proper protective equipment?
- Do I know the spill and fire procedures?

Safety Reminder: Vapors are often the greatest hazard. Handle every container carefully and always follow your organization’s safety procedures.



Wildfire Smoke and Air Quality

Protecting Employees, Operations, and Property

Wildfires and smoke can create serious health, safety, and operational risks — even far from an active fire. Monitoring conditions and preparing in advance can help protect employees, facilities, and business operations.



Monitor Local Conditions

Track wildfire warnings and air quality alerts, and establish clear response triggers for your operations. When air quality is poor, limit outdoor activities, especially for individuals who are more sensitive to smoke. For necessary outdoor work, follow your organization’s safety procedures and use properly fitted, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health-approved respirators when required.

Protect Your Property

If your facility is near an active wildfire:

- Maintain defensible space around buildings.
- Remove debris from roofs and gutters.
- Use fire-resistant roofing and exterior materials.
- Install fine-mesh screens over vents and openings.

Review Your Response Plan

Update your wildfire emergency response plan and conduct regular preparedness drills. Confirm arrangements with roofers, landscapers, and restoration companies before an emergency occurs.

Check Conditions Before You Go

Before outdoor work, travel, or site visits, review:

- [National Weather Service](#) for U.S. weather and wildfire alerts.
- [Canadian Wildland Fire Information System](#) for Canadian wildfire conditions.
- [AirNow.gov](#) for current AQI information.
- [AirNow Interactive Map](#) for localized air quality conditions.
- [CDC Wildfire Smoke](#) guidance for health and exposure tips.

Safety Reminder: Wildfire conditions and air quality can change quickly. Monitor alerts, follow local guidance, and limit smoke exposure whenever possible.

[Click for more about Fire Prevention, Education and Mitigation | National Interagency Fire Center.](#)

Fuels and Fire Behavior Advisory

Early Dryness Elevates Wildfire Risk

Northwest fire conditions resemble those normally seen in mid-August.

Record-low snowpack across the Pacific Northwest, combined with ongoing drought, above-average temperatures, and below-normal precipitation, has caused vegetation and dead fuels to dry much earlier than usual. Fire activity is already reflecting conditions typically seen later in the season, with recent lightning strikes igniting fires that spread rapidly.



Why Conditions Are More Dangerous

Spring rain encouraged abundant grass and vegetation growth across the region. As those fine fuels dried, they created continuous layers of combustible material that can increase fire intensity and accelerate the rate of spread.

Current conditions include:

- Longer periods of active burning.
- Drought-stressed vegetation that ignites and burns more easily.
- Rapid fire growth when dry fuels align with wind, particularly in eastern Washington.
- Deeper burning in dry soil and organic material, requiring additional resources and more time to contain.
- Critically dry heavy fuels that typically retain moisture into midsummer.

Earlier and More Intense Fire Activity

This year, conditions already resemble mid-August dryness. Fuels that do not normally support sustained fire spread this early are actively burning, and waterways and surrounding vegetation may no longer serve as reliable fire barriers.

Risks to Firefighters and Communities

These conditions increase the potential for:

- Rapid fire growth and sustained crown fires.
- Wind-carried embers that ignite fires more than half a mile away.
- Greater resistance to suppression efforts.
- Earlier large fires and longer incidents.
- Increased smoke, evacuations, and threats to infrastructure.
- Active fire behavior at higher elevations up to a month earlier than normal.

Back-to-School Traffic Safety

Sharing the Road with Young Pedestrians

According to the National Safety Council, most children killed in school bus-related incidents are ages 4 to 7 and are walking when the incident occurs. They may be struck by the bus or by a driver illegally passing a stopped bus. Drivers can help prevent these tragedies by remaining alert and following basic safety precautions.

Watch for Young Pedestrians

- Do not block a crosswalk while stopped at a red light or waiting to turn. This forces pedestrians into moving traffic.
- When school-zone lights are flashing, slow down and yield to pedestrians in crosswalks and intersections.
- Always obey crossing guards and school patrol officers.
- Watch carefully for children near schools, playgrounds, parks, and residential areas.
- Never honk or rev your engine to frighten or rush a pedestrian.
- Never pass a vehicle stopped for pedestrians.
- Be prepared to stop, regardless of who has the right of way.

Share the Road With School Buses

- Allow more following distance behind a school bus than you would behind a passenger vehicle. This provides additional time to react when the bus begins to stop.
- Slow down and prepare to stop when yellow lights flash.
- Stop when red lights flash, and the stop arm is extended.
- Never pass a bus from behind while it is loading or unloading children.
- On an undivided road, traffic traveling in both directions must stop for a bus loading or unloading children.
- Stop far enough away to give children space. The 10 feet surrounding a school bus is the most dangerous area.
- Remain alert. Children may move unpredictably or fail to recognize traffic hazards.

Safety Reminder: Slow down, eliminate distractions, and expect children to be present whenever you drive near schools or school buses.



Bicycle Safety

Stay Alert: Watch for Bicyclists

As students return to school, drivers should expect more bicyclists in school zones and residential neighborhoods. On most roads, bicyclists have the same rights and responsibilities as motorists, but they can be difficult to see. Young riders may also have trouble judging traffic speed, distance, and road conditions.

Common collisions occur when a driver turns left across the path of an approaching bicyclist or turns right in front of a rider traveling beside the vehicle. Drivers can help prevent these incidents by slowing down, eliminating distractions, and scanning carefully at intersections, driveways, and crosswalks.

Drive With Care

- **Pass Safely** — Reduce your speed and leave at least 3 feet between your vehicle and the bicyclist.
- **Yield when turning left** — Wait for approaching bicyclists to pass before completing your turn.
- **Check before turning right** — Look in your mirrors and blind spots, allow bicyclists to clear the intersection, and always signal.
- **Expect sudden movement** — Children may turn, stop, or enter traffic without looking or signaling.
- **Watch driveways and parked vehicles** — Bicyclists may enter the road unexpectedly or be hidden from view.
- **Respect bike lanes** — Check for riders before crossing or entering a bike lane.
- **Open doors carefully** — Check your mirrors and blind spots before opening a vehicle door.
- **Stay alert near schools** — Slow down and watch for bicyclists near schools, parks, playgrounds, and homes.

Help Young Riders Stay Safe

Before children ride to school, review the safest route and practice it together. Choose roads with lower speeds, bike lanes, or less traffic whenever possible. Make sure children wear properly fitted helmets and check that their tires, brakes, and chains are working correctly.

Remind young riders to travel in the same direction as traffic, obey signs and signals, and use hand signals before turning or stopping. Encourage them to wear bright or reflective clothing, avoid phones and headphones, and make eye contact with drivers before crossing in front of a vehicle. They should never assume a driver can see them.

Use the following [Back-to-School Checklist](#) to help everyone prepare for a safe school year.



Workplace Violence

Workplace Violence Prevention

Recognize concerning behavior, respond safely, and report every incident.

Workplace violence includes any act or threat of physical violence, harassment, intimidation, or other threatening or disruptive behavior that occurs at a worksite. It can affect employees, customers, visitors, and others connected to the workplace. These incidents can range from verbal threats and aggressive behavior to physical assaults and other acts that place people at risk.

All threats and aggressive behavior should be taken seriously. Report concerns immediately to your supervisor and the appropriate Health, Safety, and Environment (HSE) or Human Resources (HR) representative. Early reporting allows the organization to assess the situation and take steps to protect employees.

Recognize Concerning Behavior

Warning signs may include verbal threats, intimidation, harassment, aggressive outbursts, threatening gestures, or sudden changes in behavior. One warning sign does not necessarily mean violence will occur, but concerning conduct should never be ignored. Employees should report what they observe and allow trained personnel to evaluate the situation.

If a Situation Begins to Escalate

Your safety should always come first. If you encounter an aggressive or threatening person:

- Remain calm and speak in a steady, respectful tone if it is safe to do so.
- Avoid arguing, making sudden movements, or responding with hostility.
- Keep a safe distance and position yourself near an exit when possible.
- Do not physically confront, touch, or attempt to restrain the person.
- Leave the area if the situation continues to escalate.
- Alert a coworker, supervisor, security officer, or emergency personnel without placing others at risk.
- Call 911 if you believe someone is in immediate danger.
- Follow your organization's emergency response and notification procedures.

If you cannot safely leave, move to a secure location and call for help. Do not attempt to intervene in a violent incident unless you are trained and authorized to do so.

Report Every Incident

After reaching safety, report the incident as soon as possible, even if no one was injured. Provide clear details about what occurred, who was involved, and whether any threats were made. Timely reporting helps identify patterns, address hazards, and prevent future incidents.



Vehicle 360 Walk-Around

A Key Safety Check: The 360-Degree Walk-Around

Performing a 360-degree walk-around is an essential safety step before operating any vehicle. This brief inspection helps drivers identify damage, obstacles, clearance concerns, and other hazards that may not be visible from the driver's seat.



Follow these six steps before driving:

1. Conduct a Pre-Trip Visual Inspection

Observe the vehicle's overall condition and check the surrounding area. Look for visible damage, fluid leaks, underinflated tires, loose equipment, or anything unusual.

2. Complete a Full Circle Check

Walk completely around the vehicle. Make sure no people, animals, equipment, or other obstacles are beside, behind, or underneath it.

3. Identify Nearby Hazards

Look for parked vehicles, poles, curbs, debris, uneven surfaces, and other objects that could interfere with your path. Pay particular attention to areas hidden by the vehicle's blind spots.

4. Confirm Proper Clearance

Ensure there is enough room to move safely. Check overhead clearance for tree branches, signs, loading structures, power lines, and other obstructions. Also look for low-lying hazards near the tires or undercarriage.

5. Verify the Vehicle Is Secure

Check that doors, compartments, tailgates, and cargo are properly closed or secured. Confirm that mirrors, windows, lights, and license plates are clean and unobstructed.

6. Complete a Final Review

Before moving, take one final look around the vehicle and confirm that the intended path remains clear. Conditions can change quickly, especially in busy parking lots and work areas.

Safety Reminder: A complete 360-degree walk-around takes only a few moments and can prevent injuries, collisions, property damage, and costly delays. Make it part of every trip.

Four-Step Reporting Process

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Report ALL bodily injuries (workers compensation), property damage (automobile/building), and near misses/close calls. Below are the four steps for reporting an incident:

EVALUATE
Evaluate the situation & determine if 911 should be called. When in doubt call 911.

CONTACT
Contact your supervisor. Be prepared to give them the following information:
Who, What, Where, and When.

CALL
Call your local Health and Safety team member:

Michelle Brickie	(UICGS) (Hawaii)	907.677.5219
Carl Nayakik	(UICAOD) (Utqiaġvik, AK)	907.600.9896
Mauricio Gueco	(UICCS) (Anchorage, AK)	907.600.9233
Kevin O'Shea	(BT) (Anchorage, AK)	907.677.5292
Ron Hoon	(UICGS) (Lead, PA)	717.422.6626
Martanaze Hancock	(UICGS) (Springfield, VA)	703.399.9477
Aaron Ludwick	(UICGS) (Colorado)	719.729.3863
Kenneth Scott	(UICGS) (Maryland)	443.252.7074
Thomas Olemaun	(UICCS) (Utqiaġvik, AK)	907.852.4460
Michael Timo	(UICGS) (Portland, OR)	571.319.9490
Michael Hawkins	(UICGS) (Fac. Mgt.) (Springfield, VA)	703.405.0314
Bernice Oyagak	(UIC Municipal) (W&S) (Anchorage, AK)	907.677.5204
Jason Howard	(UICGS) (Crane, IN)	812.854.5294
Christopher Monetta	(UIC) (Springfield, VA)	540.656.0740

COMPLETE
Complete & return the **INOI** (Initial Notification of Incident) form(s).

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Let Us Go Without Injury

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