



Fire Safety

## eSafetyLine

### **A Deadly Case Study**

Some days on the jobsite are busier than others. On those really busy days, your housekeeping duties may seem to be just one more thing to do that doesn't seem all that important. You may also think "so what, there's some garbage lying around, how is that some huge fire hazard?" Hopefully this following case study will help to change your mind and keep you and others on your jobsite safe.

The morning of 26 March 2004 started like most others at the jobsite in Richmond VA. The site was a \$13 million project at Virginia Commonwealth University that would include 3 floors of student housing and 1 floor of retail restaurant space. The site was 3 months old and at a little after noon it caught fire. The fire progressed very quickly, mainly due to the newly framed wood interior.

The original building burned to the ground and the fire jumped to buildings across a 4 lane street. The intensity of the fire and its ability to spread was fueled by 15 mph winds that day. In total 200 firefighters responded and had the blaze under control by mid-afternoon. A total of 30 separate buildings were damaged, with damage estimated at \$20 million.

The cause of the fire was found to be a lit cigarette tossed by a construction worker into an overstuffed trash chute. No workers on-site were injured because of the timing of the fire- everyone was out of the building for lunch. The fire was worsened by the 15 mph winds and the building's wooden frame. The city of Richmond's fire code mandates that the frame be steel or concrete.

Miraculously, there was only one death and it wasn't directly caused by the fire. A woman died when her oxygen supply was cut when the power went out as a result of the fire. A law suit was filed against the General Contractors for negligence and breach of contract. The laws suit was based on two facts:

- The building had a wood frame and violated the city's fire code.
- Proper fire extinguishing equipment wasn't present on the site and the employees weren't trained to use it.

Without question this was, hopefully, a once in a lifetime accident. However, a fire like this is waiting to happen if you and your coworkers aren't on top of your housekeeping duties. This catastrophe could have been avoided if the over-stuffed chute had been cleared before breaking for lunch and if a worker hadn't used the site as an ashtray and butted out the cigarette before disposing of it. It also helps to highlight the importance of having the correct fire extinguishers on the jobsite and being trained and comfortable using them. You have the responsibility of keeping the jobsite neat- it may save a life.

### **Discussion Questions**

What factors caused this fire to spread so quickly?

Where the presence of fire extinguishers directly related to this fire?

# MEETING / TRAINING ATTENDANCE ROSTER

COMPANY: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ SAFETY MEETING

JOB/DEPT: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ SAFETY TRAINING

DATE: \_\_\_/\_\_\_/\_\_\_

TIME: \_\_\_\_\_

TOPICS ADDRESSED: \_\_\_\_\_

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## EMPLOYEE'S SIGNATURES

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EMPLOYEE SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: \_\_\_\_\_

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ACTION TAKEN: \_\_\_\_\_

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Supervisor's Signature

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Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Safety Coordinator's Signature

\_\_\_/\_\_\_/\_\_\_  
Date