

**Basic Fire Safety and the Role of the Fire Marshal at RU**

**prepared by**

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🕮 Also refer to [www.ru.ac.za/safety/fire](http://www.ru.ac.za/safety/fire)

*Lives lost in a fire can never be replaced.*

*Many organisations in South Africa never fully recover after a major fire – losing orders, contracts, key employees and reputation – or may have to close down, resulting in lost jobs and services to the community.*

*This is why it is important to focus on workplace fire prevention, as well as being prepared for the unexpected: having an emergency action plan.*

This handout aims to reinforce the learning process of the 1-morning fire marshal course conducted by the Rhodes University SHE Officer, addressing the following: a basic understanding of fire and the safety risks associated with fire, preventing fire, actions to take in the event of a fire, and elements of planning for workplace emergencies and evacuations – in preparation for the role of workplace fire marshal, or other role-player in an emergency evacuation.

## 1. CAUSES AND PREVENTION OF FIRE

### **Chemistry of fire and spread**

A fire needs fuel + oxygen + heat to start, and to keep burning. It is a kind of chemical reaction, involving these three major components – illustrated as the three sides of a triangle.

***Triangle of combustion***

The **fuel** may be:

* Combustible solids – e.g. paper, wood, fabrics, plastic, rubber, coal.
* Flammable liquids – e.g. oil, paraffin, spirits, petrol.
* Flammable gases – e.g. LPG, oxygen, petrol fumes, doom spray.

The **heat** of a fire spreads through:

* Direct flame – e.g. burning match or wind-driven firebrand from bush fire.
* Conduction – movement of heat through solid matter, e.g. steel.
* Radiation – heat given off by an object without direct contact, e.g. an electric heater.
* Convection – movement of heat through the air.

***Oxygen***



***Fuel***

***Heat***

The **oxidising agent** is usually Oxygen.

🖐 ***Flashover*** *– a fire fighter’s greatest fear. As the smoke and heat from a fire in one room build up, a superheated thermal layer spreads – by convection – causing the rest of the building to burst into flame after only three or four minutes!*

### **Knowing the type of fire**

If you know the type of fire you are dealing with, it helps you decide how best to control it. Fires are classed according to the type of material that is burning – most commonly: A (solid organic m), B (flammable liquid/gas), C (electrical), or D (metal). This is summarised in ***Table 1*** (classes of fire) on the next page.

### **Links between causes and prevention of fire**

The major causes of fires – based on the findings of a study of 20,000 industrial fires – are summarised in ***Table 2*** (causes and prevention of fire). Notice how we can learn from past accidents: by establishing the causes, we can make recommendations for the prevention of further fires in our workplaces.

Electrical problems were found to be the main cause of fires (21%), followed by friction (14%), reaction between different substances (12%), open flames (9%), smoking (8%), spontaneous ignition (8%), hot surfaces (7%), sparks (6%), and overheated materials (3%). The last 12% were attributed to a variety of less common, or unknown, causes.

The study found that most fires started while the premises were unoccupied.

In private homes, the ten appliances most likely to catch fire are the washing machine, tumble dryer, dishwasher, cooker, fridge/freezer, central heating, microwave, toaster/grill, TV and electric blanket.

Common mistakes made by many people is placing a hot appliance too close to furniture, such as a heater under a desk, and blocking off the ventilation area of electrical equipment while it is on, which causes it to overheat and catch fire.

We will find out more about the some of the main causes of fire in ***Table 2*** on the next page.

**Table 1: Classes of fire**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | | |
| **CLASS OF FIRE** | **MOST SUITABLE extinguisher** | **OTHER suitable extinguishers** |
|  | | |
| **A (solid organic materials)**:  solid materials such as wood, paper, coal, plastic and fabrics. | **Water**: has a cooling effect, but can conduct electricity. Fire hose reels rely on a functioning municipal water supply. Mostly used in stockrooms, schools, offices, etc. Only use to fight class **A**. | **Foam**: floats on flammable liquids to tame the fire and helps prevent re-ignition. To clean up the affected area, it must be washed away and left to evaporate. Mostly used in garages, homes, vehicles, workshops, etc. Can be used to fight class **A** & **B**.  **Dry powder** |
|  | | |
| **B** **(flammable liquid/gas)**:  oil, petrol, paraffin, spirits, benzene. | **Dry powder**/**DCP**: is a multipurpose dry chemical extinguisher, filled with a yellow powder, mono ammonium phosphate, which smothers the fire and absorbs some of the heat. Non-conductive but mildly corrosive if moisture is present, so proper clean-up is essential. Mostly used in schools, general offices, hospitals, homes, etc. Can be used to fight class **A**, **B**, **C** & **D**. | **Fire blanket**: is made of fire-retardant material such as fibreglass or wool. The blanket is placed over the fire to cut off the supply of oxygen to the fire. Mostly used in kitchens and laboratories.  **Carbon dioxide**  **Foam**  Do not use water! |
|  | | |
| **C** **(electrical)**:  involving contact with live electrical installations, e.g. short-circuiting machinery and overloaded electrical cables. | **Carbon dioxide**: CO2 displaces O2 (oxygen) and smothers the fire. It has limited cooling power. Environmentally friendly. Leaves no residue, so clean-up is not needed. Mostly used where contamination is to be avoided, e.g. kitchens, computer rooms, laboratories, etc. Not very effective on class A fires (only temporarily displaces oxygen). Can be used to fight class **B** & **C**. | **Dry powder**  Do not use water! |
|  | | |
| **D (metal)**:  involving combustible metals, e.g. magnesium & titanium (used in lightweight equipment), aluminium (in some pots and pans, etc) – mostly in the presence of sawdust, machine shavings & other metal shavings. | **Dry powder** or special extinguisher approved for use on combustible metals. | Do not use water (or other common fire-fighting materials), as it can ‘excite’ combustible metal fires and make them worse. |

**Table 2: Causes and prevention of fire**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **CAUSES (fire hazards)** | **SOURCE OF IGNITION** | **PREVENTION (fire precautions)** |
| * Poor maintenance of electrical appliances. * Overloaded circuits. * Misuse/abuse of appliances. * Use of incorrect appliances. | 1. **Electrical 21%** | * Ensure wall sockets and multi-plug adaptors are not overloaded. * Switch off appliances when not in use. * Never run cables under carpets. * Have temporary wiring replaced. * Get an electrician to check all wiring on a regular basis. |
| * Hot bearings in machines. * Broken or badly fitted machine parts. * Badly adjusted power drives and conveyors. | 1. **Friction 14%** | * Machinery & equipment should be inspected & tested on a regular basis. * Ensure mechanical equipment is properly maintained. * Report any defects immediately. |
| * Metal particles mixing with materials being processed, causing mechanical sparks. | 1. **Reacting substances 12%** | * Machinery & equipment must be inspected & tested on a regular basis. * Ensure mechanical equipment is properly maintained. * Report any defects immediately. |
| * Misuse/abuse of gas & oil burners. * Abuse & misuse of cutting & welding torches, petrol/paraffin blowtorches. | 1. **Open flames 9%** | * Remove combustible material from area where open flames are used. * Always have a fire extinguisher ready for use. * Personnel doing cutting & welding must be fully trained. * Hot work permits must be issued where required. |
| * Smoking in areas where combustible material is present. * Dropped cigarettes/matches & incorrect disposal. | 1. **Smoking 8%** | * Provide sufficient ashtrays & designated smoking areas. * Empty all ashtrays into metal containers. * Adhere to no-smoking zones. * Keep matches away from children & individuals lacking control. |
| * Oil waste and rubbish. * Build-up of dust/deposits in tumble driers, ducts & flues. * Stored low-grade material waste (mixed paper, cardboard, newspaper, magazines, etc). | 1. **Spontaneous ignition 8%** | * Ensure oil-soaked materials are not left lying around. * Discard oil-soaked materials in metal bins with lids. * Sawdust used as absorptive material on the floor should be swept up and discarded immediately. |
| * Hot surfaces of heaters, irons boilers, hot pipes & flues, etc, too close to materials which can catch fire. | 1. **Hot surfaces 7%** | * Never leave heaters, irons, etc, on when unattended. * Keep combustible materials away from hot surfaces. |
| * Sparks from burning rubbish, furnaces, braais, campfires, angle grinders, etc. * Sparks from industrial vehicles. | 1. **Sparks 6%** | * Keep flammable liquids & combustible materials away from area where there is burning of rubbish, braais, campfires, etc. * Industrial vehicles should be static-proof when working in vicinity of flammable gases. |
| * Abnormal temperatures in industrial processes. * Heated flammable liquids & substances in driers. | 1. **Overheated materials 3%** | * Do not put materials soaked with flammable liquids into driers. * Store cleaning fluids & other flammable liquids in an approved flammable store. * Know the safety info of each liquid – use the material safety data sheet (MSDS). |

## 2. ACTION IN THE EVENT OF FIRE

### **Response to fire**

If you see a fire, no matter how small, you must immediately alert the local fire depart­ment. Fires spread and get out of control very quickly, and they have trained and equipped professionals who can deal with it. Think of the four golden rules:

*In the event of a fire or other emergency, remember four golden rules:*

**Fire Action! 4 Golden Rules**

1. **Alarm**: Raise the alarm to alert others – siren/whistle /panic button/air horn/shout “Fire, get out!”
2. **Emergency Services**: Call no matter how small.

Save these numbers on your cell phone:

* CPU Emergency **046 603 8999**
* Makana Fire & Rescue **046 622 4444**

1. **Extinguish**: Only try to extinguish if safe to do so. **\***
2. **Evacuate**: Everyone must get out. Crawl if necessary, to avoid smoke/heat suffocation.

* Help people with disabilities.
* Close windows and doors if you can.
* Don’t take risks: do NOT use lifts; do NOT open closed doors (there may be fire in the room); do NOT go back inside – until instructed by Fire Officer or Emergency Coordinator.
* Meet at your Assembly Point for roll call.

🖐 *First think about the safety of people, then the safety of the building and its contents*.

**EMERGENCY NUMBERS**

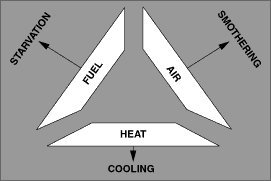
*save on your cell phone!*

**Fire Department: 046 622 4444 / 046 603 6000**

**RU Campus Protection: 046 603 8999** (EMERGENCIES) 046 603 8146/7 (CPU office)

### **Extinguishing fire**

* + 1. **Principles of firefighting**

Remember the ***Triangle of Combustion*** (section 1.1) – we aim to remove one (or more) of sides of this triangle to put out a fire.

**Smothering**: eliminates oxygen supply (air) to the fire – use dry powder, fire blanket or sand.

**Starvation**: removes fuel from the fire – not possible in most cases.

**Cooling**: eliminates the heat, so ignition temperature cannot be reached – use water or remove the source of heat (if safe).

* + 1. **Types of fire extinguishers**

If you know the type of fire you are dealing with, it helps you choose the correct fire extinguisher. Remember that fires are classed according to the type of material that is burning (***Table 1***). Look for the symbol on the fire extinguisher (A, B or C, or all of these) to check which type of fire it can be used on.

The most common types of extinguishers at Rhodes University are DCP (dry powder) and fire hose reels (water), but in certain areas you will also find CO2 (computer labs) and fire blankets (kitchens). This is summarised in ***Table 3*** below.

**Table 3: Types of extinguishers used on class A, B, C and D fires.**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Extinguisher type:**  **Fire**  **class** | **WATER**  ANd9GcTjjRks_W-BUOS_NzJ2yo_8O8wfmAK5lnXyK5qVheBhm6YtgnX5 | **POWDER**174W_FireExt_01 | **CO2**  2kg CO2 | **FIRE BLANKET** home%201%20kit |
| Solid materials  **A** | **✓** | ✓ | ✓ |  |
| Flammable  **B**  liquids |  | **✓** | ✓ | **✓** |
| Electrical  **C** |  | ✓ | **✓** |  |
| **D**  Metal |  | **✓** |  |  |

🖐 *It is against the law to use safety equipment – such as fire extinguishers – for anything other than its intended purpose (OHS Act, Section 38). If found guilty, a person could be fined up to R50,000.*

* + 1. **Using a hand-held extinguisher**



*Safety pin prevents us from squeezing the trigger accidentally!*

Adopt the **PASS** principle:

**P** – Pull the pin

**A** – Aim the nozzle at base of fire

**S** – Squeeze the trigger

**S** – Sweep the nozzle from side to side

🖐 ***Only attempt to extinguish a fire if:***

* It is small and not spreading;
* You know how to use the fire extinguisher;
* You have your back to a known SAFE EXIT.

🖐 ***Do NOT use the fire-fighting equipment in your building for demonstration purposes***. Contact the University's Campus Protection Unit or Engineering section for demo equipment. The SHE Officer can also assist with fire safety talks and demonstrations.

🕮 Also refer to [www.ru.ac.za/safety/fire/extinguishers](http://www.ru.ac.za/safety/fire/extinguishers)

## 3. PLANNING FOR BETTER FIRE SAFETY

It is of utmost importance to focus on ***preventing*** workplace fires. It is equally important to ***be prepared for an unexpected emergency***, by having an emergency action plan.

### **Safety inspections**

An important aspect of workplace fire safety is to ***reduce the risk*** of fire by inspecting for hazards. The Fire Department may come to inspect premises at Rhodes University.

Regular monthly checks by fire marshals play a valuable role in ensuring that the workplace remains fire safety compliant. Adopt the **CARE** principle:

**C** – check: Do regular checks in the workplace for fire hazards – such as those listed in ***Table 2*** (causes and prevention of fire) and in the workplace health and safety inspection checklist (see section 4).

**A** – act: Ensure that action is taken as soon as possible to address all hazards you find – either immediate action, or calling in assistance or maintenance staff to implement the necessary fire precautions.

**R** – report: Communicate your findings, recommendations and actions to your workplace health and safety rep– who should record this information in the workplace health and safety inspection report.

**E** – educate: Alert your colleagues of any fire safety concerns, and remind them of ways to improve fire safety – at staff meetings or using your workplace emailing list.

### **Fire-related resources**

* + 1. **Fire alarms**

It is vital to have a distinctive and recognized system for signalling to all employees that they should evacuate the workplace, or carry out other actions as per the emergency plan. If there is no automatic alarm, the Director/HOD/Manager must ensure that there is some way of warning occupants if their lives are in danger.

* **Manual evacuation alarm**: Anything that makes a loud noise, e.g. referee’s whistle, hand bell, megaphone with siren, air horn, break-glass box, etc. Until such time as a building has an automatic alarm installed, a manually set off device is better than nothing.
* **Automatic fire detection alarm**: A fire alarm system with a smoke/heat/gas detector that sets off automatically in response to smoke/heat/gas. At RU, these have a direct radio link to the Campus Protection Unit, so if the fire alarm system is set off, the CPU will automatically receive a signal.
* **Signal tests**: If your building has an automatic fire detection alarm, you should contact the CPU to arrange for a signal test session, for example, before you hold a fire drill in your building.

At Rhodes University, the ***Electrical*** section of Infrastructure and Operations is responsible for installing and maintaining fire alarms.

* + 1. **Firefighting equipment**

At least once a month, fire marshals should check fire hydrants and hand-held fire extinguishers in their area, as follows:

*Extinguisher in good working order (gauge in green area).* 

* Check that it is properly mounted;
* Check the label to see when it was last inspected;
* Check that access to the extinguisher is not blocked;
* Check the gauge, if its position has moved out of the green into the red area, it requires servicing – contact the Engineering section;
* Check that signage is in place to indicate location of fire-fighting equipment.

The ***Engineering*** section of Infrastructure and Operations at RU is responsible for supplying and maintaining fire-fighting equipment – approximately 450 fire hose reels and 1500 handheld fire extinguishers – on campus. They contract a certified service provider to inspect and service all fire-fighting equipment on an annual basis.

* + 1. **Escape routes and fire exits**

Every person at Rhodes University is responsible for adhering to the rules by keeping escape routes and exits clear of furniture, boxes and other items.

* **Exit doors**: Must be kept clear of obstructions, and should open with one single movement.
* **Escape routes**: Should be clearly marked and kept clear, so that occupants can get out quickly and safely.

Infrastructure and Operations should be contacted for services and support with regard to the above. Also:

* **Emergency lighting** (independent of mains): Should be provided along all escape routes and at all exit doors – ***Electrical*** section.
* **Signage** (white lettering – minimum of 75 mm in height – on a red background): should be in place to indicate escape routes and exits – ***Signage*** section.
* **Fire escapes**: External fire escapes (stairs or ladders) may be required in some cases (large buildings with only 1 internal stairwell) – ***Engineering*** section.

### **Emergency action plan**

Rhodes University’s leadership is responsible for leading the emergency management planning process – which includes (i) reducing risks and hazards; (ii) preparing resources to respond to any emergency; (iii) responding to the emergency event, and (iv) returning the workplace to normal after the event.

All buildings at Rhodes University should have a building-specific emergency evacuation procedure, and all occupants should be familiar with these procedures.

* + 1. **Emergency coordinator**

The Emergency Coordinator should be a senior member of staff, usually a Director, HOD or Manager, whose responsibilities include the following:

* Coordinating emergency planning, including calling a workplace meeting\* of the emergency team to plan and review workplace emergency procedures – especially before and after fire drills.

\*In larger buildings, different departments/sections/areas should cooperate to establish an emergency team and plan the building’s evacuation procedures.

* Assessing situations and deciding whether it is an emergency that calls for action and evacuation.
* Supervising emergency action and evacuation.
* Coordinating outside emergency services, such as the local fire department and emergency medical response, and ensuring that they are available and notified in an emergency.
* Directing the shutdown of critical workplace systems, machinery, etc, when required.
  + 1. **Emergency team**

A coordinated team of responsible staff members must be in place – in all buildings and areas on campus – comprised of the following role-players.

* Emergency coordinator: Senior member of staff with supervisory abilities.
* Fire marshals (also called fire wardens/floor monitors/incident officers): Two per floor or building area (in case one is not present at the time).
* Health and safety rep(s): Should be involved in emergency planning.
* First aider(s): Should be involved as they need to carry the first aid kit in an emergency. Contact details of nearby first aiders should also be included, in case your own first aider is are not present at the time.
  + 1. **Emergency action planning**

The emergency action plan should at the very least address t**he following important issues:**

* How to report fire or emergency;
* When to evacuate, and emergency evacuation procedures and routes – including floor plans, routes for each level or area in building;
* Emergency assembly points – primary and alternative – approx. 50 metres away (to avoid being injured by falling or burning debris, flying glass from broken windows, etc) where all occupants should meet so that the Emergency Coordinator can check that everyone is present and safe, and give further instructions.
* Contact details of all important emergency services, and contact details of all role-players in your department/section/unit;
* Procedures of emergency team role-players in your department/section/unit – e.g. who will operate fire extinguishers, who will carry the first aid kit, who will marshal staff out of the building, check the toilets and storerooms, assist people with disabilities, monitor entrance/exit points in the building, etc.
* Procedures of specific role-players in your department/section/unit – e.g. who will shut down critical workplace systems, or machinery, etc.
* **Emergency kit**: It is useful to have the following items at the ready for any emergency:
* Reflective bib/vest: worn by emergency team members - improve visibility;
* Whistle or loudhailer/megaphone: help with directing occupants;
* Checklists of building occupants (per area/level);
* First Aid Box: to deal with any injuries;
* Torch or emergency lighting: in case of poor visibility;
* Cell/mobile phone;
* Emergency Contact List‌‌ of emergency service providers etc;
* Drinking water.

🕮 Also refer to [www.ru.ac.za/safety/fire](http://www.ru.ac.za/safety/fire) and [www.ru.ac.za/safety/emergencies](http://www.ru.ac.za/safety/emergencies)

## 4. FIRE MARSHAL: ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

While Rhodes University’s leadership is responsible for emergency management planning, fire marshals play a vital role in workplace fire safety and as members of the emergency team. Fire marshal roles and responsibilities fall into two main areas.

### **Fire prevention**

When appointed, fire marshals agree to the following:

* Promoting general fire awareness and fire safety in your workplace.
* Familiarising yourself with the operation of fire-fighting equipment in your workplace.
* Checking fire-fighting equipment in your workplace at least once a month to ensure it is in working order.
* Identifying items, equipment and areas in your workplace which may be a fire hazard.
* Reporting any unserviced or damaged fire-fighting equipment or fire hazards to your HOD/manager/supervisor for necessary action, and to your health & safety rep for inclusion in health and safety report.
* Checking emergency escape routes on a regular basis to ensure they are not obstructed.

The **RU workplace health and safety inspection checklist** is helpful, as it covers the following:

* **FIRE DRILLS**: Please provide details of recent fire drill - include: a. date & time; b. evacuation time; c. numbers (e.g. present /total); d. comments & corrective action.
* **EMERGENCY EVACUATION PLAN**: a. Is a detailed plan of action for emergency evacuation in place? Ref: “Emergency Evacuation Plan of Action GENERIC” at www.ru.ac.za/safety/fire/evacuation b. Is the plan well displayed, have all building occupants been made aware of it? c. Checklist of building occupants readily accessible to emergency team?
* **FIRE SAFETY GUIDELINES & TALKS**: a. Fire safety info on display? b. When was a fire safety talk/demo held for all staff/students?
* **FIRE FIGHTING EQUIPMENT**: a. Extinguishers &/or fire hoses in place and accessible - also to people with disabilities? b. Signage present to indicates their position? c. Seals unbroken? d. Last service date?
* **EMERGENCY EXITS**: a. Clearly marked (signage)? b. Kept clear of obstructions at all times. c. Can be opened in a single movement, not deadlocked?
* **EXIT ROUTES**: a. Clearly marked and kept clear at all times? b. Emergency lights present and in working order?
* **FIRE ALARM**: a. What device/method is used to warn occupants to evacuate (automatic alarm / break glass / whistle / hand bell / other)? b. If automatic: when was last signal test arranged with CPU? c. Visible instructions on how to activate alarm or warn others in an emergency?
* **POTENTIAL FIRE HAZARDS**: Have you given careful thought to things that might be a fire hazard (e.g. faulty electrics, piles of boxes/papers, flammable oil, heater left on under desk, etc)? Take action to sort it out!

🕮 Also refer to [www.ru.ac.za/safety/checklists](http://www.ru.ac.za/safety/checklists)

### **Emergency response**

When appointed, fire marshals and their deputies agree to the following, in the event of a fire emergency:

* Ensure that the building Emergency Coordinator or HOD/manager is advised immediately.
* Assist in identifying the type of fire (a. solid; or b. liquid/gas; or c. electrical) to ensure that the correct method of extinguishing is used;
* Assist the building Emergency Coordinator during evacuation procedures;
* Assist in ensuring that occupants only re-enter the building when instructed to do so by the Makana Fire Officer or building Emergency Coordinator.

In an emergency, the fire marshal may also be required to assist with regard to one or more of the following:

* + - raise the alarm;
    - call emergency services;
    - if safe, use the fire extinguisher;
    - direct staff to safe available exit routes;
    - if safe, check areas such as toilets and storerooms to ensure all are evacuating.
    - assist disabled people.
    - close windows & doors.
    - ensure hazardous processes or machinery have been shut down or isolated
    - assist with roll call at the assembly point.
    - report to the fire service on their arrival

The fire marshal (and deputy) should be prepared at all times. In practical terms, this means:

1. Keep a checklist of building occupants on a clipboard with pen + form of identification (e.g. reflective bib or armband).
2. On hearing the fire alarm, pick up clipboard, pen and bib, and check rooms on your floor/area to ensure occupants are evacuating.
3. Go the assembly point and tick off those who are present on your checklist.
4. Note the date, time, and any observations that you think might be useful to an investigator.
5. Report the results of your roll call to the Emergency Coordinator.
6. Try to establish the whereabouts of any absentees – ***do not go back*** into the building.

🕮 More info: ***Evacuation Plan of Action GENERIC*** at [www.ru.ac.za/safety/fire](http://www.ru.ac.za/safety/fire)

***Fire Marshal Appointment Form*** at [www.ru.ac.za/safety/fire/rufiremarshals](http://www.ru.ac.za/safety/fire/rufiremarshals)