



# Safety Scene

## Fire Safety in a Component Manufacturing Facility: Part 1

by Molly E. Butz

In the blink of an eye a fire can wreck havoc on your facility. Learn what easy steps you can take to prevent a full blown catastrophe.

**C**omponent manufacturers have many things to think about every day, from production numbers to delivery schedules. With so many details to manage, it's possible that fire safety isn't on the list of priorities most of the time. However, a facility full of fire-friendly fuel means that component manufacturers should always keep fire safety in mind.

Fire safety in the plant can be broken down into two main topics—causes and prevention. For a manufacturer, the causes are very straightforward, as both fuel and ignition sources for a fire are abundant. It's no secret that component manufacturing operations contain large quantities of lumber and other wood products, sawdust, loose papers and flammable materials such as cleaning agents, lubricants, solvents and liquid propane (used for forklifts). Unfortunately, all of these materials make excellent fuel. Most plants also often contain one or more ignition sources including potentially faulty electrical wiring, welding and cutting sparks, propellant actuated tools (such as nail guns) and employee tobacco smoking (Source: OSHA Wood Products eTools: Fire and Explosion). Other ignition sources may include static electrical discharges and lightning.

**A facility full of fire-friendly fuel means that component manufacturers should always keep fire safety in mind.**

### Prevention

Eliminating the obvious fire hazards is simple enough for any component manufacturer to accomplish. Each of the following fire hazards is accompanied by an easy, inexpensive solution.

- **Sawdust build-up:** Good housekeeping is the easiest way for your facility to keep this fire hazard swept away. Using a good broom, be sure your area is clear from sawdust and scraps after your shift everyday, or in between shifts if it gets messy.
- **Loose cut sheets and paperwork:** Here again, housekeeping is your best line of defense. Keeping track of all of your paperwork will ensure you don't end up with dangerous piles of paperwork kindling for a fire.
- **Lit cigarettes/smoldering cigarette butts:** Designate a specific smoking area for your employees and strictly enforce your "smoking in designated areas only" policy. One careless toss could devastate your business.
- **Flammable liquids and gels:** Assign an area away from possible ignition sources to store flammable materials, such as cleaning agents, lubricants, solvents and liquid propane. In addition, train your employees to understand the hazards associated with each flammable material.
- **Welding sparks:** Physically separate job tasks that may cause a fire, such as welding operations and sawdust. If this is impossible—for instance you need to have someone repair a saw—consider dousing the area with water and then appointing a "fire watcher" to stand by with a fire extinguisher in case of an emergency. In addition, be sure each of your employees designated as maintenance

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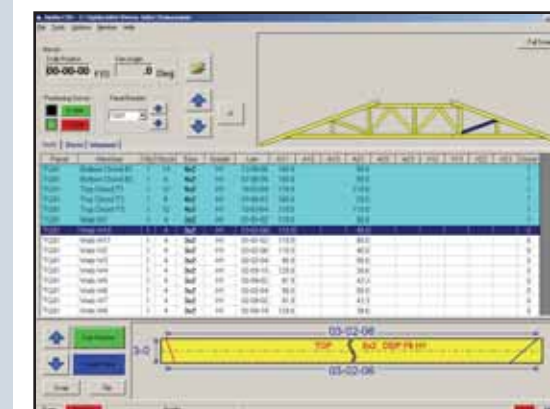
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### at a glance

- Fire safety can be broken down into the main topics of causes and prevention.
- Truss plants often contain one or more ignition sources.
- Keep spark resistant jackets handy to prevent incidents where flammable chemicals and welding sparks may exist.



## Safety Scene

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nance have all of the proper personal protective equipment they need to avoid injury (see sidebar).

- **Potentially faulty electrical wiring:** Ensure your electrical systems are rated for the purposes they will be used for and protected by appropriate circuit breakers, grounding all equipment prone to accumulating static electrical charges (Source: OSHA Wood Products eTools: Fire and Explosion).

## Prevention

With the basics out of the way, now is an appropriate time to turn our attention to the other more sophisticated and necessary ways that you can protect your facility from a devastating fire. However, flushing out the details of fire resistant materials, emergency exits, emergency alarms, sprinkler systems and in-plant fire extinguishers is a lot to cover. Stay tuned for Fire Safety in a Component Manufacturing Facility: Part 2 in the next issue of **SBC**. "One spark is all it takes to put you out of business!" (Source: Loss Control Services from CNA Insurance). Safety First! **SBC**

To pose a question for this column or to learn more about WTCA's Operation Safety Program, contact WTCA Staff at 608/274-4849, email [wtca@sbcmag.com](mailto:wtca@sbcmag.com), or view the Operation Safety demonstration online at [www.wtcalco.com](http://www.wtcalco.com).

One component manufacturer relayed the following story about fire prevention. Don't let this happen at your facility!



"As a member of our maintenance staff, I often used various lubricants, solvents and other chemicals throughout the day to fix our machinery. On one particular day, one or possibly more of these chemicals had leaked onto the cuff of my work shirt. At the time I didn't think anything of it and continued about my business. Later in the day I began a repair project that required me to do some welding and in haste, I didn't put on a protective welding jacket. The project required me to weld over my head while standing on a ladder. One of the sparks from the welding hit my unprotected shirt cuff and the combination of the chemical and the spark set my shirt on fire. Before the ordeal was over, all that was left was the collar and shoulders of my shirt. Luckily, that time, the fire was easily extinguished and I wasn't badly burned. However, a simple spark resistant jacket could have prevented the entire incident."

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