

## OSHA Training Toolbox Talk: After the Fire is Out – Beware of Lurking Hazards

*[Reference 1910.39 & 1910.106 / 1926.152]*

Once a fire is put out, we may have a tendency to relax. However, just because the flames are extinguished does not mean that we are totally safe. That is because there are several potential hazards that could still be lurking. Here are some of the things I'm talking about:

- Be aware that the floor in the area near where the fire was extinguished could be very slippery. This can be caused by water or other extinguishing media (such as foam or powder) remaining on the floor. So never run when responding to a fire, and always use extra caution when walking around the area after the fire has been extinguished so you don't slip and fall.
- Cartons, boxes, or other containers can become damaged or weakened when exposed to flames or water. So stay clear of these items if they are stacked on shelves or other areas around you to make sure they don't fall over or on top of you.
- The heat from a fire can cause pressure to build up inside of nearby canisters and cylinders that contain compressed gases or some liquids. Therefore it is possible for these containers to burst if handled roughly. So let them cool off before handling them.
- It is not uncommon for embers to continue to smolder for a long period of time after a fire has been extinguished. These could reignite the fire if they go undetected in areas with combustible materials nearby (such as near cardboard boxes, pallets, or even between walls). So be sure to inspect closely for smoldering embers, and cool them off with water or other extinguishing media when they are discovered.
- Burning materials can create hazardous byproducts, such as carbon monoxide (also known as C.O.). This is a very toxic gas that is colorless and odorless, and can cause carbon monoxide poisoning if you inhale too much of the gas. And many combustible materials, such as plastics and flammable liquids, could also generate other toxic gases when they burn. So make sure the area where the fire occurred is well ventilated before you go back in to inspect or clean up. And if in doubt about the safety of the atmosphere, have someone (like a safety professional or member of the fire department) check the atmosphere with a gas detector to ensure it is safe to enter.

Does anybody have a question or comment about these, or any other, potential hazards that we need to be aware of after a fire has been extinguished? Please be sure to sign your name to the training certification form so you get credit for attending this training session.