



PENNSYLVANIA LUMBERMENS MUTUAL  
INSURANCE COMPANY

# COMMON HAZARDS

All too often we spend time reviewing new operations, machinery, equipment, products and operations at the expense of ignoring the common hazards we encounter on a daily basis. As a reminder of the things we cannot let fall between the cracks, a number of common hazards and control strategies will be presented for review and consideration. The common hazards are a direct result of recent loss trends that are surfacing for wood niche customers of PLM.

Common occurrences include:

- Smoking
- Housekeeping
- Accumulation of sawdust piles
- Brush and weeds
- Building roof and siding damage
- Common electrical hazards

## SMOKING

Smoking is a severity exposure that is present in all wood operations from retail dealer operations to sawmills. Careless and uncontrolled smoking is responsible for many building fires and sadly is an exposure that can be easily identified and controlled. No Smoking signs should be prominently posted throughout all building and yard areas. Smoking should only be allowed in designated non-smoking areas. Butt receptacles should be provided and the use of the receptacles should be strictly enforced. Employees smoking in non-designated areas should be subject to disciplinary action up to and including discharge from employment.

## HOUSEKEEPING

Housekeeping has re-emerged as a serious hazard of mill and yard locations. Due to the changes in workforce, many employees who were responsible for housekeeping have been either laid off or reassigned to other duties. As a result, general housekeeping has deteriorated resulting in hazardous conditions that are contributing to building fires. Accumulations of wood waste located inside of buildings, under machines and equipment, under the sawmill floor areas, around tail wheel, and contacting building wall and roof areas need to be cleaned up and moved to locations a minimum distance of 100' from all building areas.

## ACCUMULATION OF SAWDUST PILES

Piles of sawdust allowed to accumulate inside of buildings and many times on roof areas of buildings present both a risk of collapse and fire hazard. Accumulations of sawdust from sawmill and millwork operations should be cleared from around buildings on a regular basis. Sawdust contacting buildings and machinery/equipment should be considered fugitive dust and should be moved to alternate locations a minimum of 100' from all buildings areas.

## BRUSH AND WEEDS

The growth of brush and weeds around building areas is another common area of concern. With an economic demand on available man-hours, many times Mother Nature takes over allowing vegetation to grow into building areas. All brush and weeds within a minimum of 20' of all building areas should be cut down and removed from adjacent building contact areas.

## BUILDING ROOF AND SIDING DAMAGE

Building roof and siding damage is noted to almost always result from forklifts or other vehicles contacting siding and roof soffit areas while moving materials. All damaged siding and roofing materials including soffits should be repaired or replaced.

## COMMON ELECTRICAL HAZARDS

Common electrical hazards present one of the most severe hazards for all wood niche business operations. Electrical issues are responsible for a high percentage of building fires. A program of periodic visual inspection of common electrical hazards is crucial in identifying and controlling the source cause of many building fires.

Specific things to look for include:

- The use of flexible wire extension cords
- Damaged or frayed cables, cords, or cord ends
- Junction and panel boxes should be in good repair with no damaged or missing covers or knock-outs
- All use of Romex (sheathed plastic coated wiring) should be replaced with rigid conduit or BX cables in any commercial operation

Even though it is a challenge to find the available man-hours to inspect for and monitor common fire hazards, it is time well spent that will reduce the probability of a building fire. As a business owner, reviewing common hazards is one positive predictive tool that you can use to prevent fires from occurring in your business operations.