



Flash Fire Demos Prompt Some To Reevaluate Clothing

In 2014, Westex held a live flash fire demonstration at Texas A&M's state-of-the-art testing facility. This year's lineup included NFPA 2112 experts, burn unit specialists and some of the most realistic flash fire tests ever performed. SmartBrief, the leading online publisher of targeted business news, had the opportunity to hear firsthand accounts of real-life flash fire incidents. The takeaway was eye-opening — insights were uncovered that demonstrate the importance of events like this when it comes to educating the industry on the significance of FR safety. Read the following article that resulted from our conversations with safety professionals just like you.

Safety managers consider several factors when evaluating PPE clothing, such as protection, comfort, value and compliance. For many, knowing that fire-resistant clothing is compliant is enough — but after watching a flash fire demonstration in which several types of compliant FRCs were put to the test on manikins, some plan to reevaluate what their employees are wearing.

Manikins wearing non-compliant clothing, such as cotton and poly cotton, and 2112-compliant garments from the top sellers in the FRC market were exposed to flash fires to see how each withstood burn conditions. Cotton and poly cotton continued to burn minutes after the flash fire ended, while the fire-resistant garments self-extinguished almost immediately.

However, there are two very important things FR clothing should do; one is not ignite and continue to burn. Second, it should be able to insulate the wearer from the hazard so that it minimizes burn injury through the garment. This second factor is a big part of why simply accepting anything that complies is risky and unwise; if all one looks for is a 'pass' label, you'll never see the huge performance differences that exist among compliant garments.

One key factor that John Allen, U.S. onshore commercial manager for Wood Group PSN, often considers is comfort. By the beginning of May, his employees in South Texas had already experienced 100-degree temperatures, so finding lightweight options that his employees like and that are compliant has been an issue.

"We're struggling over NFPA 2112 and finding garments that meet the standards," Allen said. "To see how they tested was an eye opener."

Now, Allen plans to reassess what employees are wearing at every location, and going forward, plans to spend more time asking suppliers for specific data on how clothing fared in burn tests.

Jordon Tench, process safety engineer for BP America, said in the past he's looked at PPE based solely on if they met NFPA 2112 standards.

"I'd thought that if they complied, they were all the same," he said. "But I didn't fully understand what the standards meant and what was behind them."

In the future, Tench said he plans to be more aware of all the FRC options available.

"It really comes down to what's proven in the industry."

Brad Livingston, whose partner was killed and who was severely burned in back-to-back well explosions 23 years ago, appreciates the effort that Allen and Tench put into understanding safety standards and compliance issues.

"Buying, using, giving your guys cheap PPEs, it doesn't work," Livingston said. "You'll have to explain to those families why your company spent the least amount of money possible on their protection. What a difference it would have made for me that day. You have to buy the right stuff. It's a shortcut if you don't."

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