

# Combustible dust

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This publication provides practical workplace safety and health information to assist you in making your place of work safer. It is not legal advice. SAIF has made every effort to bring significant Oregon Occupational Safety and Health Administration (Oregon OSHA) regulations to your attention. Nonetheless, compliance with Oregon OSHA remains your responsibility. You should read and understand all relevant Oregon OSHA regulations that apply to your job site(s). You may want to consult with your own attorney regarding aspects of Oregon OSHA that may affect you.

**Note:** The information in this publication is time sensitive. Do not rely upon this document if its publication date is more than three years old. Please check the "Safety and health" section of our web site at [saif.com/safetyandhealth](http://saif.com/safetyandhealth) for a more recent, printable copy. You'll also find a variety of other valuable safety information designed to help your business prevent injuries and control costs.

## What are the risks?

Combustible dust explosion hazards exist in a variety of industries, including food (such as candy, starch, flour, and feed), plastics, wood, rubber, furniture, textiles, pesticides, pharmaceuticals, dyes, coal, metals (such as aluminum, chromium, iron, magnesium, and zinc), and fossil-fuel power generation. The vast majority of natural and synthetic organic materials, as well as some metals, can form combustible dust.

The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) Industrial Fire Hazards Handbook states:

“Any industrial process that reduces a combustible material and some normally noncombustible materials to a finely divided state presents a potential for a serious fire or explosion.”

The primary factor in an assessment of these hazards is whether the dust is combustible. Any material that will burn in air in a solid form can be explosive when in a finely divided form. Different dusts of the same chemical material will have different ignitability and explosive characteristics, depending on many variables such as particle size, shape, and moisture content. One possible source for information on combustibility is the safety data sheet (SDS). However, do not rely on it as a sole source of information. In some cases, additional information, such as test results, will be available from chemical manufacturers.

Facilities should carefully identify the following to assess their potential for dust explosions:

- Materials that can be combustible when finely divided
- Processes that use, consume, or produce combustible dusts
- Open areas where combustible dusts may build up
- Hidden areas where combustible dusts may accumulate
- Means by which dust may be dispersed in the air
- Potential ignition sources

## Know the dust fire and explosion pentagon

The following OSHA fire and explosion pentagon diagram shows that combustible dust explosions include the three factors of the familiar fire triangle (fuel, heat, and oxygen), plus the factors of dispersion of dust particulates and the confinement of the dust cloud.



## Avoid the secondary dust explosion

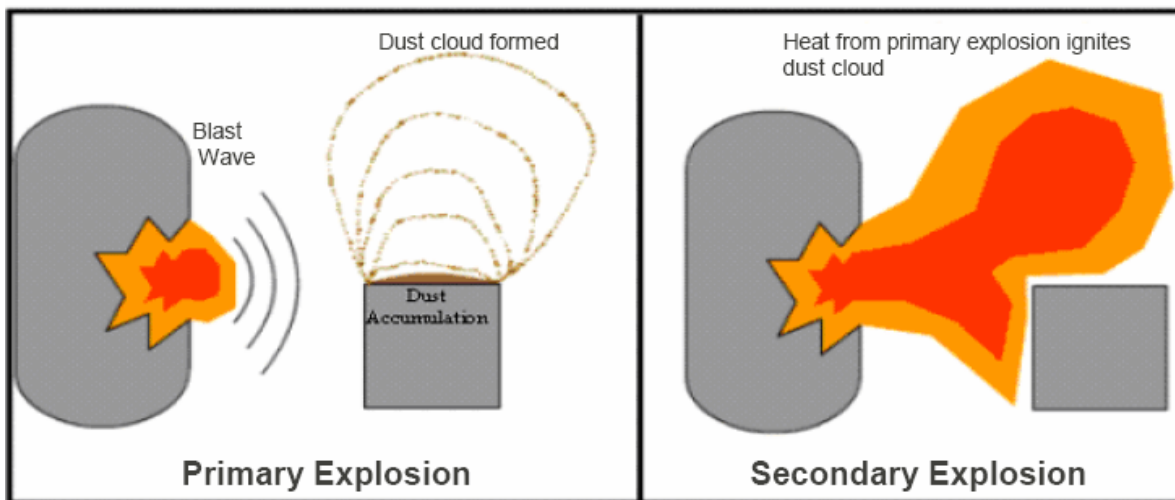
A primary dust explosion (deflagration) occurs when dust that is suspended within a confined area (such as container, room, ventilation system, or piece of equipment) ignites and explodes.

Depending on the amount of settled dust in the area, a small primary explosion may cause powerful secondary dust explosions. A secondary dust explosion may also follow a primary non-dust explosion (such as natural gas, pressure, or vessel).



Source: OSHA

A secondary dust explosion is the result of dust accumulation inside an enclosed area being disturbed and lifted in the air, then ignited by the primary explosion. The following OSHA illustration shows the difference between a primary and secondary explosion.



Source: OSHA

## Learn from serious accidents

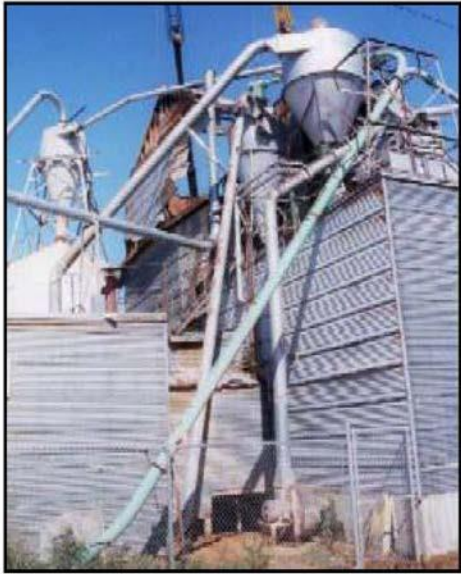
A number of combustible dust accidents have caused deaths and serious injuries. Here are some examples to review and discuss during program reviews and employee training.

### Oregon incidents

- Commercial Furniture, Roseburg; May 16, 2006: An employee suffered second- and third-degree burns on his hands and arms from a dust fire triggered after two workers changed a bag filter on a powder coating line for office furniture.
- Willamette Industries, Albany; October 25, 2000: An employee died from burns from a combustible dust fire. Investigators found large amounts of wood flour and dust on equipment and lighting fixtures and determined that the fire was ignited from an employee changing a light bulb that was covered in wood dust.
- Mill Rite Farms, Albany; August 8, 2002: Workers were processing feed pellets when the system failed. An employee went upstairs to investigate and was killed when dust in the air exploded and set off a fire. Two other employees suffered serious burns and smoke inhalation.

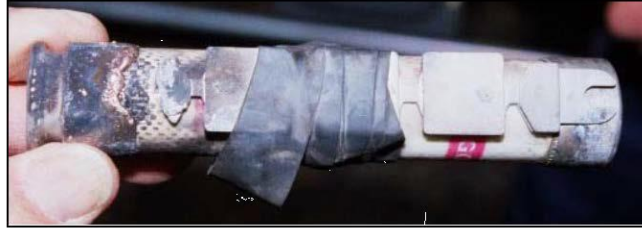
Ace International, Albany; August 11, 2003: A worker died after suffering burns and inhaling toxic, superheated air. A defective piece of electrical equipment created a spark that ignited wood flour and dust.

Investigation photos:



The top of the factory roof was destroyed in the wood-dust explosion.

Source: OSHA



A melted fuse was repaired by taping a renewable fuse link on the outside.

View the entire Oregon Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation investigation report from this link: <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/face/stateface/or/03or021.html>

## A recent Oregon OSHA investigation

West Oregon Wood Products, Banks; July 31, 2014: Four employees escaped an explosion and fire at a facility that produces wood pellets. The dust collector exploded due to static electricity buildup and discharge. The collector did not have a proper bonding and grounding system. Large accumulations of settled dust were also noted.



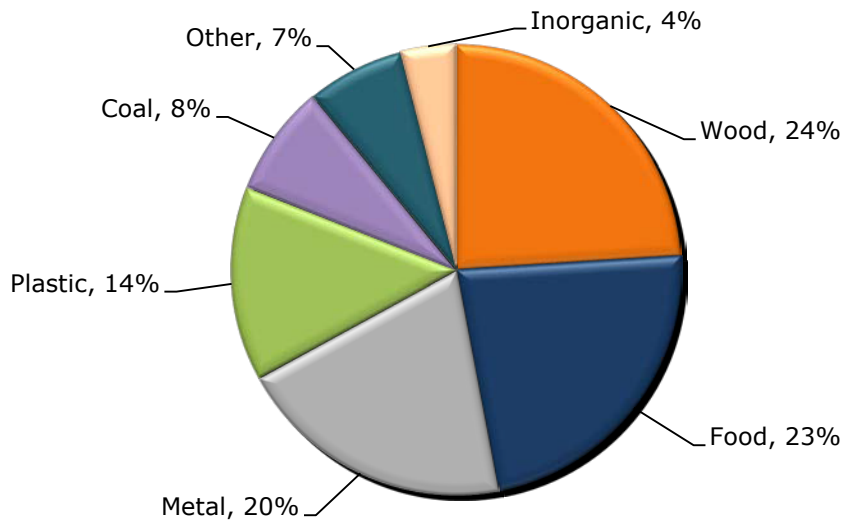
Source: OSHA

The resulting fireball traveled through the ductwork (not equipped with automatic fire dampers) into the plant's work area and caused an explosion in the processing equipment. This explosion ignited and melted the ceiling's water barrier, which was an improper material. Molten plastic rained down onto the workers, but they were able to escape safely.



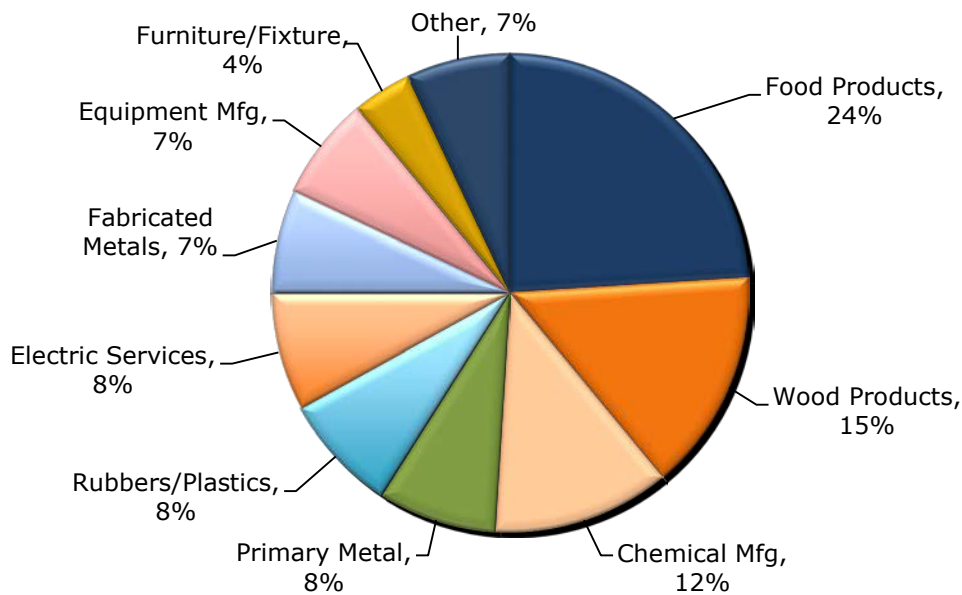
Source: OSHA

### Types of dusts found in incidents nationwide



Source: OSHA National Emphasis Program

## Industries with dust incidents nationwide



Source: OSHA National Emphasis Program

## National emphasis program

Oregon OSHA carries out the National Emphasis Program (NEP) for combustible dust in Oregon. You can view the program document here: <https://osha.oregon.gov/OSHARules/pd/pd-268.pdf>

The program covers Oregon OSHA health inspection scheduling in:

- Industries with more frequent or severe incidents
- Industries with potential for incidents
- Other sources such as referrals

Oregon OSHA health inspectors look at:

- Site conditions
- History of incidents
- Safety data sheets
- Dust accumulations
- Dust collectors, ductwork, and other containers
- Efforts to abate the hazard

Common violations found in their inspections include:

- Improper housekeeping (floors and other surfaces). Often, settled dust inches-thick is found.
- Improper electrical equipment (portable shop lighting, light socket on wall)
- Blowdown wands used at high pressure (>30 psi)

- Improper dust collection system (location, type, controls)

Violations are rated low probability/serious injury or low probability/death depending on the hazards found.

Oregon OSHA’s Occupational Health Laboratory and federal OSHA’s Salt Lake City Technical Center have conducted testing on dust collected during inspections and consultations. In most cases, the dusts were found to be combustible and included these kinds of materials:

- Wood dust/products
- Paper and cardboard dust
- Agricultural products: pumpkin, corn powder, soy flour, hay, grass seed dust, wheat dust, bamboo dust
- Metal dust: titanium and aluminum
- Other dusts: carbon black, carbon fiber, fiberglass resin, rubber, Corian, urea glue, bedliner, PVC dust, powder coating dust

## Review your hazards and controls

Use this tool to assess a facility’s potential dust explosion hazards and the controls in place. Refer to the **Resources** section that follows for more detailed information.

**Step 1:** Find out if the company processes any of these products or materials in powdered form. If so, there’s a potential for a combustible dust explosion.

<p><b>Agricultural Products</b></p> <p>Egg white Milk, powdered Milk, nonfat, dry Soy flour Starch, corn Starch, rice Starch, wheat Sugar Sugar, milk Sugar, beet Tapioca Whey Wood flour</p> <p><b>Agricultural Dusts</b></p> <p>Alfalfa Apple Beet root Carrageen Carrot Cocoa bean dust Cocoa powder Coconut shell dust Coffee dust Corn meal Cornstarch Cotton</p>	<p>Cottonseed Garlic powder Gluten Grass dust Green coffee Hops (malted) Lemon peel dust Lemon pulp Linseed Locust bean gum Malt Oat flour Oat grain dust Olive pellets Onion powder Parsley (dehydrated) Peach Peanut meal and skins Peat Potato Potato flour Potato starch Raw yucca seed dust Rice dust Rice flour Rice starch Rye flour Semolina</p>	<p>Soybean dust Spice dust Spice powder Sugar (10x) Sunflower Sunflower seed dust Tea Tobacco blend Tomato Walnut dust Wheat flour Wheat grain dust Wheat starch Xanthan gum</p> <p><b>Carbonaceous Dusts</b></p> <p>Charcoal, activated Charcoal, wood Coal, bituminous Coke, petroleum Lampblack Lignite Peat, 22%H<sub>2</sub>O Soot, pine Cellulose Cellulose pulp Cork Corn</p>	<p><b>Chemical Dusts</b></p> <p>Adipic acid Anthraquinone Ascorbic acid Calcium acetate Calcium stearate Carboxy-methylcellulose Dextrin Lactose Lead stearate Methyl-cellulose Paraformaldehyde Sodium ascorbate Sodium stearate Sulfur</p> <p><b>Metal Dusts</b></p> <p>Aluminum Bronze Iron carbonyl Magnesium Zinc</p> <p><b>Plastic Dusts</b></p> <p>(poly) Acrylamide (poly) Acrylonitrile (poly) Ethylene (low-pressure process)</p>	<p>Epoxy resin Melamine resin Melamine, molded (phenol-cellulose) Melamine, molded (wood flour and mineral filled phenol-formaldehyde) (poly) Methyl acrylate (poly) Methyl acrylate, emulsion polymer Phenolic resin (poly) Propylene Terpene-phenol resin Urea-formaldehyde/cellulose, molded (poly) Vinyl acetate/ethylene copolymer (poly) Vinyl alcohol (poly) Vinyl butyral (poly) Vinyl chloride/ethylene/vinyl acetylene suspension copolymer (poly) Vinyl chloride/vinyl acetylene emulsion copolymer</p>
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Source: OSHA federal OSHA Combustible Dust Poster (<https://www.osha.gov/sites/default/files/publications/combustibledustposter.pdf>)



## **Step 2:** Assemble a review team.

Work with knowledgeable employees from within the facility, including the facility safety manager, production superintendent or supervisor, equipment operators, electrician or electrical engineer, and maintenance employees or mechanical engineer.

Each employee should provide knowledge into the processes and equipment throughout the facility. The production superintendent and supervisors should provide a detailed knowledge of the process from beginning to end. They should be able to identify raw materials, intermediate materials, and the final product. Equipment operators will be able to provide insight on how the equipment operates, its operating parameters, and sources of fugitive dust emissions. An electrician or electrical engineer should be able to provide information on Class II and Class III locations, and if equipment and wiring meet the requirements for hazardous locations. Maintenance employees or a mechanical engineer should provide maintenance records and service logs for equipment. More importantly, these are the individuals who may be assigned to remedy fugitive dust emissions, implement preventative maintenance programs, or make modifications to material transfer points.

## **Step 3:** Confirm combustible dust hazard controls are in place.

### **Materials used and past incidents**

- Review safety data sheets (SDSs) and related information for the chemicals and materials used or processed to determine the potential to create combustible dusts.
- If the facility has a history of fires and explosions involving combustible dusts, review the potential causes of these incidents and the preventive measures put in place following the incidents.

### **Dust control measures**

- Make sure settled dust layers on horizontal surfaces, including exposed rafters, do not exceed a depth of 1/32 inch, either on:
  - More than 5 percent of all horizontal surfaces for a building up to 20,000 square feet, or
  - Up to 1,000 square feet for buildings greater than 20,000 square feet.

Confirm the dust-containing systems (ducts and dust collectors) are designed in a way that does not expose employees to hazards, nor allow fugitive dusts to accumulate in the work area.

Examples include:

- No leaking of dust into work area
  - Collected air exhausted to the outside
  - Dust collectors not located inside buildings (some exceptions)
  - Dust collector cleaning locations away from the work area
  - Isolation devices to prevent deflagration propagation (spreading) between pieces of equipment connected by ductwork
- 
- The working surfaces are designed to minimize dust accumulation and facilitate cleaning.
  - The facility has a housekeeping program with regular cleaning frequencies established for floors and horizontal surfaces (such as ducts, pipes, hoods, ledges, beams, cable trays, and

on and around equipment) to minimize dust accumulations within operating areas of the facility.

- The cleaning methods used prevent combustible dusts from being suspended in the air. High-efficiency (HEPA) vacuum cleaning equipment or wet methods are recommended. Blowing off the settled dust with compressed air is discouraged.
  1. This housekeeping hierarchy is followed:
  2. Vacuum is preferred method, intrinsically safe, and is a central system.
  3. Water washdown or sweeping (not vigorously)
  4. Compressed air is only used for hard-to-reach areas. Processes with ignition sources shut down, air pressure is limited, and work is done in small zones.

### **Ignition control measures**

Consider potential ignition sources, including open sparks or flames from welding or abrasive cutting or grinding; embers; electrical equipment; static sparks; and hot surfaces (such as dryers, extruders, and heaters).

- Electric cleaning devices, such as sweepers or vacuum cleaners, and electrical equipment are approved for the combustible dust locations.
- Spark detection and fire and explosion suppression systems are well designed and maintained.
- The facility has an ignition control program, such as grounding and bonding and other methods, for dissipating any electrostatic charge that may be generated while transporting the dust through the ductwork.
- The facility has separator devices to remove foreign materials capable of igniting combustible dusts (such as iron filings).
- The facility has a Hot Work Program, including performing hot work in approved locations; written permitting procedures for hot work outside of designated areas; fire watcher training; and fire extinguisher user training.
- Combustible dust locations and other areas where smoking is prohibited are posted with "No Smoking" signs.
- Duct systems, dust collectors, and dust-producing machinery are constructed of noncombustible materials and are bonded and grounded to minimize accumulation of static electrical charge.
- The facility selects and uses powered industrial trucks (such as forklifts and loaders) that are approved for the combustible dust locations.
- Consult with fire prevention specialists from your property insurance carrier on the options and resources for conducting infrared (IR) thermography studies to identify potential ignition sources.

### **Prevention measures**

- Safety data sheets (SDSs) or other information for the chemicals and materials that could become combustible dusts are available to employees.
- Employees have had hazard awareness training on the fire and explosion hazards of combustible dusts and the control methods.

## Protection measures

- The facility has an emergency action plan.
- Rooms, buildings, or other enclosures (dust collectors) have explosion relief venting distributed over the exterior wall of buildings and enclosures and directed away from work areas.
- Emergency exit routes are maintained properly to allow clear and visible exit routes.
- The personal protective equipment (PPE) has been selected for the job tasks involving combustible dusts, including:
  - The need for flash-resistant clothing has been determined for employees required to work in environments where combustible dust hazards exist.
  - Airborne concentrations of respirable dust have been evaluated to determine the need for respirators.
  - A written respiratory protection program that includes respirator selection, training, medical screening, and fit testing, is in place where respirators are needed.
- Consult with the fire prevention specialists from your property insurance carrier on the fire protection system, including:
  - Automatic sprinkler system is designed for the occupancies present and commodities stored.
  - Water supply is adequate for the system design.
  - Idle pallets and flammable liquids are stored properly for the system design.

## Resources

### Oregon OSHA

Combustible dust hazard alert

<https://osha.oregon.gov/OSHApubs/hazard/2993-17.pdf>

Combustible dust national emphasis program inspection guidelines

<https://osha.oregon.gov/OSHARules/pd/pd-268.pdf>

### Federal OSHA

Combustible dust topic page

<https://www.osha.gov/dsg/combustibledust/index.html>

Combustible dust poster

<https://www.osha.gov/sites/default/files/publications/combustibledustposter.pdf>

Combustible dust in industry: Preventing and mitigating the effects of fire and explosions

<http://www.osha.gov/dts/shib/shib073105.html>

### WorkSafe BC (British Columbia)

Injury Prevention Resources for Wood Products Manufacturing

<https://www.worksafefbc.com/en/resources/health-safety/hazard-alerts/controlling-the-hazards-of-combustible-dusts-in-manufacturing?lang=en>

## **Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (Germany)**

Dust explosion database |search for testing results for various materials

<http://staubex.ifa.dguv.de/explosuche.aspx?lang=e>

## **National Fire Protection Association (NFPA)**

Related codes and standards

<https://catalog.nfpa.org/>

NFPA 61, Standard for the prevention of fires and dust explosions in agricultural and food processing facilities

NFPA 68, Guide for venting of deflagrations

NFPA 69, Standard on explosion prevention systems

NFPA 70, National electric code

NFPA 77, Recommended practice on static electricity NFPA 86, Standard for ovens and furnaces

NFPA 91, Standard for exhaust systems for air conveying of vapors, gases, mists, and noncombustible particulate solids

NFPA 484, Standard for combustible metals

NFPA 499, Recommended practice for the classification of combustible dusts and of hazardous (classified) locations for electrical installations in chemical process areas

NFPA 654, Standard for the prevention of fires and dust explosions from the manufacturing, processing, and handling of combustible particulate solids

NFPA 664, Standard for the prevention of fires and explosions in the wood processing and woodworking facilities

NFPA 2113, Standard on selection, care, use, and maintenance of flame-resistant garments for protection of industrial personnel against flash fire

NFPA 85, Boiler and combustion systems hazard code

## **Oregon Occupational Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation (OR-FACE) Program**

Fatality reports

<https://www.ohsu.edu/xd/research/centers-institutes/oregon-institute-occupational-health-sciences/oregon-fatality-assessment-control-evaluation-face/>