National Burn Awareness Week

February 4th – 10th, 2018
The American Burn Association estimates there are approximately 486,000 burn related injuries requiring medical treatment each year. Of these burn related injuries, 8% occurs in the workplace. Given that information, this means that there are roughly 38,880 that occur to workers who are burned each year due to inadequate training/awareness, a lack of guarding/personal protective equipment, or neglect/shortcuts/distractions.

Prevention
The first step to preventing burns is necessary training on policies and procedures. Workers should be made aware of sources in their workplace. Burns can be caused from thermal, chemical, electrical, friction, radiation, or even cold temperature. It is important that employees become familiar with existing hazards that they may come across. The most common types of burns in the workplace are thermal and chemical.

Thermal Burns
Thermal burns can be caused by extremely hot surfaces or fires. To prevent burns from surfaces, guards shall be installed to prevent accidental contact, personal protective equipment must be worn, and signage shall be placed to caution employees. To mitigate the possibility of burns from exposure to fires, emergency action plans shall be developed and practiced. Additionally, firefighting equipment such as fire extinguishers and sprinkler systems should be inspected as required. Further precautions should also be taken for hot work where sparks and/or flames are expected.

Chemical Burns
To prevent chemical burns, it is always important to understand what you are working with. All workers should observe the warnings on the labels and adhere to manufacturer recommendations within the Safety Data Sheets. If a pictogram is shown representing the chemical being a corrosive, it has the potential to cause chemical burns. The Safety Data Sheet will identify the necessary steps that should be taken whether it’s personal protective equipment, first aid measures, etc.

It Can Happen to Anyone!
If you have policies in place, employees are trained, and control measures are taken, the last foreseeable cause of a burn would be due to a worker believing an accident will not happen to them so they may let down their guard. Workers must always understand – Accidents can happen to anybody! To ensure this is understood, random inspections should be conducted. When hazards or unsafe conditions/acts are observed, corrective actions should be taken and an effective disciplinary action should be taken. For instance, if smoke is observed to be rising out of a trash can, this can be an indication that a worker may have tossed a cigarette butt into the can instead of disposing it in a correct manner. This can lead to a fire and eventually a burn and any smoldering should be extinguished. Additionally, this also means a safety concern was disregarded. To compliment the corrective action, disciplinary actions should be taken towards the employee who caused this near miss. Burns are going to occur but there are steps you can take to make sure that they do not occur in your workplace.