

Are You Responsible for the Fire Protection System in a Critical Facility? Here's What You Need to Know Now about New California Environmental Regulations

If you're like many facility owners and managers, you probably don't think too often about your fire protection system. Of course, you hope it works in the unlikely event of a fire, but there's now more to be concerned about if your facility is located in California.

Back in 2006, the California Global Warnings Solutions Act or Assembly Bill (AB) 32 was signed into law by Governor Schwarzenegger to help fight climate change with a comprehensive program to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. As part of this program, it was mandated that all new fire protection systems in the state must use an agent with a global warming potential (GWP) below a minimum threshold level. This mandate took effect last year.

The new stricter environmental regulations don't apply to existing systems. However, if you will be specifying or purchasing a new fire protection system installation in the coming months and years, compliance is necessary. This is creating some concerns that require a closer look at what agent is chosen for a fire protection system.

A Little Background on Fire Extinguishing Agents

For decades, halon was the most common fire extinguishing agent because of its versatility and ability to minimize damage to valuable assets like computer equipment, museum artifacts, and ships engines. However, as scientists began to understand more about the dangers of certain chemicals on the Earth's ozone layer, halon was eventually phased out. This was a good thing. Halon had one of the highest ozone-depletion potentials of any chemical in use!

As a result of the phase-out of halon in the 1980s, hydrofluorocarbon agents (HFCs) were introduced. Because their ozone depletion potential was zero, they appeared to be a good long-term solution. And, for the last twenty years, HFCs have become ubiquitous in fire protection systems.

However, as we continue to learn more about the environmental impact of chemicals, new concerns develop, and this is the case with HFCs. While they are not depleting the ozone, researchers now believe that they are contributing to global warming and that their footprint on the environment is substantial. So substantial, that AB 32 has limited the use of HFCs.

So, Now What?

Makers of fire extinguishing agents are now seeing the writing on the wall that HFCs will eventually be phased out, not unlike halon. While California is leading the way in state environmental regulations, most industry experts believe that similar guidelines will eventually be adopted throughout the United States and beyond.

This is leading to the development of new fire protection agents with environmental characteristics that are superior to those previously available. 3M has been particularly proactive by introducing Novec 1230 Fire Protection Fluid which offers both a viable long-term solution for special hazards fire protection and a

dramatic reduction in atmospheric impact. In fact, this agent's atmospheric lifetime is a mere five days, compared to a period of about 30 years for HFCs.

If you are or will be specifying or purchasing a fire protection system, it's essential that you work with an industry expert who can help you choose a system that is compliant with state regulations.

At [Sabah International](#), we consider it our job to stay absolutely current on state and federal environmental regulations, as well as with the most current options for fire extinguishing agents and equipment. Want to learn more? [Contact us today](#).