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Six Ways to Manage Combustible Dust in a Labor Shortage



When the entire country is experiencing record high labor shortages, and companies are losing more than a trillion dollars every year from voluntary turnover (before The Great Resignation), staffing is undoubtedly a priority to your company. As a business, you're likely facing the "Do more with less" approach we've all had to face.

When you have challenges in your business, you'll often prioritize those activities that generate revenue and let other tasks fall to the wayside. Unfortunately, OSHA inspectors will not be sympathetic to your staffing concerns when it comes to dust management. Even worse, combustible dust doesn't become less of a risk just because you're short on staff.

You still have options though. Below, we'll offer six options for maintaining combustible dust compliance even in a labor shortage.





#1 Don't Clean. At All.

You can always choose to do nothing; as a few companies do. Even if it feels easier, it's not practical for a number of reasons. First, there's the fines for non-compliance. An OSHA visit could cost you considerably more than occasionally shutting down your plant to clean. And you may have to adjust your processes entirely to deal with the OSHA violations.

Then there's the safety risk. A combustible dust event can be catastrophic. Failure to clean dust buildup puts your facility, and more importantly, your employees at risk. It's not hard to see that doing nothing is not the best option.



#2 Clean Less Frequently.

At this point, you probably have a good idea of how often you need to clean to stay in compliance. For many facilities, a lack of staff and high demand for their products extend the cleaning frequency. Instead of monthly cleanings, facilities may opt to clean quarterly, or once a year.

This can happen in facilities with heavy dust-production where the buildup is a constant. Employees may become jaded by its presence and feel as if their work isn't making a difference. Unfortunately, cleaning less frequently still puts you at risk. While it's less likely you'll be hit with a fine, a combustible dust event is still a possibility and one you'll want to avoid.



#3 Find Temporary Workers.



If your regular staff isn't available to clean, you may be able to bring in contract workers or temporary help. Local staffing agencies will likely be able to help you with this and you may see benefits of repeat use of the agency. You'll likely pay a premium for short-term work, but at least you can maintain cleaning schedules.

Of course, you'll need to train these workers and that will require oversight and management. If you bring in new people every time, consistency could be an issue, and you'll have to hire and train continually. Each of these training responsibilities comes with an added cost of time, too.



#4 Hire a Third-Party Cleaning Firm.

Outsourcing might be your best cleaning option if you don't have the internal staff. Unfortunately, it's easily the most expensive option. You'll need to shut down operations, schedule the cleaning firm, and then get operations back up and running. All things considered, you may be shutting down production at least a few times a year. That kind of down-time can really add up.

In fact, depending on your cleaning schedule, the cost of the cleaning crew can become very expensive. It could cost you tens, even hundreds of thousands of dollars each year. This may be a simple solution but because of the impact on profitability, it's also likely a short-term solution.



#5 Pay Overtime.

When you can't fit the necessary cleaning into your regular work schedules, you may have to pay staff overtime to come in and clean. This may be an option for those facilities that aren't operating 24/7, but if you are running three shifts around the clock, there just isn't any time to make this a realistic option.

You'll also need to keep in mind the extra cost. It's incredibly expensive to pay overtime, particularly if it isn't generating revenue. Employees brought in to do these "extra" tasks may also resent it; so make very sure you're addressing all the costs, including morale.



#6 Prevent Dust Buildup.

Dust is inevitable. But accumulation in overhead and hard-to-reach areas doesn't have to be. Dust control fans keep dust from reaching these spaces making cleanup a breeze. All staff has to do is occasionally sweep up dust from the floor when they have a free moment. Or use an auto sweeper/scrubber to clean the floors. After all, if you don't have fugitive dust buildup, you don't have to clean.

You may think this is the most expensive option because it comes with an initial investment. However, the amount you save in cleaning expenses and shutdowns will pay for the system pretty quickly. Plus, it eliminates the headaches of scheduling and staffing housekeeping.

Of course, at SonicAire, we're partial to the final option. The numbers show that the best way to deal with fugitive dust is to prevent it from being a nuisance in the first place. That's why we offer customers a free dust management plan with ROI analysis. You'll see exactly what's necessary to prevent dust buildup and how quickly you'll pay off your investment. We're so confident in our products' ability to solve your cleaning problems that we even offer a SonicAire Compliance Guarantee.



Visit [SonicAire.com/ROI](https://www.SonicAire.com/ROI) to request your plan and eliminate the painful process of manual dust cleanings in your facility.

