

Introduction

Whilst fire safety is only one of many safety issues with which management must concern themselves to minimise the risk of injury or death to staff or the public. Unlike most of the other safety concerns, fire has the potential to injure or kill large numbers of people very quickly.

If you are the responsible person¹ in your organisation you must carry out a fire risk assessment focusing on the safety in case of fire of all relevant persons². It should pay particular attention to those at special risk, such as disabled people, those who you know have special needs, young

persons and must include consideration of any dangerous substance liable to be on the premises. Your fire risk assessment will help you to identify risks that can be removed or reduced and also to decide the nature and extent of the general fire precautions you need to take.

If your organization employs five or more people, your premises are subject of a licensing regime or an 'alterations notice' is in force, you must record the significant findings of the assessment, however, it is good practice to record your significant findings in any case.

¹ 'Responsible person' means (a) in relation to a workplace, the employer, if the workplace is to any extent under his control; (b) in relation to any premises not falling within paragraph (a) - (i) the person who has control of the premises (as occupier or otherwise) in connection with the carrying on by him of a trade, business or other undertaking (for profit or not); or (ii) the owner, where the person in control of the premises does not have control in connection with the carrying on by that person of a trade, business or other undertaking.

² 'Relevant persons' means (a) any person (including the responsible person) who is or may be lawfully on the premises; and (b) any person in the immediate vicinity of the premises who is at risk from a fire on the premises, but does not include a fire-fighter who is carrying out firefighting activities.

Fire Risk Assessment

Managing Fire Safety

Good management of fire safety is essential to ensure that fires are unlikely to occur; that if they do occur they are likely to be controlled or contained quickly, effectively and safely; or that, if a fire does occur and grow, everyone in your premises is able to escape to a place of total safety easily and quickly.

The risk assessment that you must carry out will help you ensure that your fire safety procedures, fire prevention measures, and fire precautions (plans, systems and equipment) are all in place and working properly, and the risk assessment should identify any issues that need attention.

How do you carry out a Fire Risk Assessment?

A fire risk assessment will help you determine the chances of a fire starting and the dangers from fire that your premises present for the people who use them and any person in the immediate vicinity. The assessment method should share the same approach as that used for other health and safety legislation such as the HSE 5 steps of risk assessment and can be carried out either as part of a more general risk assessment or as a separate exercise.

Before you start your fire risk assessment, take time to prepare, and read through the Communities and Local Government Fire Safety Risk Assessment Guide that is applicable to your type of organisation. This series of guides has been written to provide simple guidance for a responsible person, to help them to carry out a fire risk assessment. The guides are available as a free of charge download at:

www.firesafetyguides.communities.gov.uk

or can be obtained from any good bookseller.

Much of the information for your fire risk assessment will come from the knowledge your employees, colleagues and representatives have of the premises, as well as information given to you by people who have responsibility for other parts of the building. A tour of your premises will probably be needed to confirm, amend or add detail to your initial views.

It is important that you carry out your fire risk assessment in a practical and systematic way and that you allocate enough time to do a proper job. It must take the whole of your premises into account, including outdoor locations and any rooms and areas that are rarely used. If your premises are small you may be able to assess them as a whole.

In larger premises you may find it helpful to divide them into rooms or a series of assessment areas using natural boundaries, e.g. process areas (such as bakeries and cooking facilities in shops), offices, stores, as well as corridors, stairways and external routes.

How do you carry out a Fire Risk Assessment? (cont'd)

If your premises are in a multi-use complex then the information on hazard and risk reduction will still be applicable to you. However, any alterations to the use or structure of your individual unit will need to take account of the overall fire safety arrangements in the building. Your premises may be simple, with few people present or with a limited degree of business activity, but if it forms part of a building with different occupancies, then the measures provided by other occupiers may have a direct effect on the adequacy of the fire safety measures in your premises.

Under health and safety law you are required to carry out a risk assessment in respect of any work processes in your workplace and to take or observe appropriate special, technical or organizational measures.

If your health and safety risk assessment identifies that these processes are likely to involve the risk of fire or the spread of fire then you will need to take this into account during your fire risk assessment under the **Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005** and prioritise actions based on the level of risk. You need to appoint one or more competent persons to carry out any of the preventive and protective measures needed to comply with the Order. This person could be you, an appropriately trained employee or where appropriate, a third party.

Your fire risk assessment should demonstrate that, as far as is reasonable, you have considered the needs of all relevant persons, including disabled people.

Other fire safety advice relevant to the workplace is available on the Fire Gateway website www.fire.gov.uk. This website also allows you to complete an online appraisal of your fire safety measures providing an indication of whether you are complying with the order. This service is offered free of charge.