The Ultimate Guide to Fire Risk Assessments

INFINITE FIRE & SECURITY

FIA Fire Industry Association

Introduction

Every year people die or are seriously injured as a result of fires in non-domestic properties. Besides the human risk, fire costs UK business millions of pounds due to property damage, fines, compensation, and insurance premiums. Many businesses find that they are not able to recover from the effects of a fire.

- **Who is responsible for fire safety in non-domestic premises?**
- **What are their duties and responsibilities?**
- **How can I keep people and property safe?**
- **What are the possible consequences of failure to act?**
- **Where can I get help and guidance?**

This guide will help to answer these questions and help you to successfully manage fire safety in commercial premises.

UK fire safety legislation places emphasis on preventing fires and reducing risk. Anyone who has some control over premises must take reasonable steps to reduce the likelihood of fire and make sure people can safely escape if there is a fire. The regulations apply to virtually all non-domestic premises in the United Kingdom; in England and Wales the communal areas (common parts) of blocks of flats, are also included.

If you are an employer or have control over the premises or activities that take place on the premises, then you have responsibilities under fire safety legislation. It is your duty to ensure the safety of the people in the premises. In the case of people who are not employers but have control over premises, the extent of your responsibility will depend on the extent of your control. As this can be a complicated issue, it is sensible for organisations to identify clearly who is responsible for what.

UK fire safety legislation has slight regional variations which result in different terms used for the person on whom the legislation imposes fire safety duties. In England and Wales this person is known as the 'Responsible Person', in Scotland the term 'Duty Holder' is often used, while the term 'Appropriate Person' is often used in Northern Ireland. In this guide we will refer to this person as the 'Responsible Person'. Other differences on requirements of the legislative regimes are discussed in this guide.

Premises Affected

UK fire safety legislation applies to virtually all non-domestic premises and covers nearly every type of building, structure and open space, such as:

- **Offices and shops**
- **Factories and warehouses**
- **Sleeping accommodation, hotels, hostels, and B&Bs**
- **Residential care premises, including care homes and hospitals**
- **Community halls, places of worship and other community premises**
- **The shared areas of properties (HMO's) in which several households live (housing laws also apply).** Please note, in Scotland and Northern Ireland the legislation applies to the whole HMO, not just the communal area
- **Pubs, clubs and restaurants**
- **Theatres and cinemas**
- **Educational premises, school and sports centres**
- **Outdoor events, tents and marquees**

It does NOT apply to:

- **Private homes**
- **Anything that flies, floats or runs on wheels** (unless it is static and used like a building)
- **The underground parts of mines**
- **Fields, woods or land that forms part of agriculture or forestry undertaking**

The Responsible Person

So who does fire safety legislation apply to?

The law applies to you if you are:

- **Controlling the premises**
- **An employer or self-employed person**
- **Responsible for a part of a dwelling that is used for business purposes**
- **A charitable or voluntary organisation**
- **A contractor with a responsibility for maintenance of any premises or, for example, the fire protection measures in the premises. Contractors and consultants carrying out fire risk assessments also have duties under the legislation**
- **Providing accommodation for paying guests**
- **The owner or managing agent of a block of flats in England and Wales**

In any building where there is more than one Responsible Person, they must all work together to co-operate, co-ordinate and share information with others as far as is necessary to comply with regulations.

What are the duties of the Responsible person?

Legislation says that, if you are an employer or a person having control over premises, you are responsible for the safety of everyone who might lawfully be on your premises. This includes employees, visitors or members of the public in the immediate vicinity of your premises (i.e. at an open-air entertainment venue) who might be affected by a fire.

The Responsible Person, either on their own or with any other Responsible Person, must do their best to make sure that everyone on the premises, or nearby, can escape safely if there is a fire. You should pay particular attention to people who may have a disability or anyone who may need special help.

You must address the following issues:

- **Carry out a fire risk assessment and identify possible hazards and risks**
- **Take general fire precautions**
- **Principles of fire prevention are to be applied**
- **Fire safety arrangements, fire safety policy and procedures**
- **Take account of those particularly at risk, i.e. very young people; those with special needs or disabilities; and people working with dangerous substances such as flammable liquids**
- **Provide suitable arrangements to warn people of a fire in the building such as, a Fire Detection and Alarm (FD&A) system**
- **Eliminate or reduce risk from dangerous substances (chemicals etc.)**
- **Additional emergency measures in respect of dangerous substances**
- **Provide adequate means of escape in the case of a fire such as sufficient and suitable fire exits; fire doors and compartments; signs, notices and emergency lighting**
- **Take measures for fire fighting e.g. fire extinguishers**
- **An effective fire emergency plan to be followed in the event of a fire**
- **Maintenance of all fire safety systems and equipment**
- **Ensure capabilities of employees who are given special tasks in terms of fire safety and fire procedures, and provide training to all employees and others who may need it**
- **Regularly review all**

The Fire Risk Assessment

At the core of the legislation lies the Fire Risk Assessment. This is an organised appraisal of your premises to enable you to identify potential fire hazards and those who might be in danger in the event of fire and their location.

You should evaluate the risks arising from the hazards and decide whether the existing fire precautions are adequate and identify any measures that need to be taken to further remove or reduce the fire risk.

Fire authorities no longer issue fire certificates and those previously in force have no legal status. However, any fire certificates issued in the few years before the new legislation came into force may be a good starting point for your fire risk assessment. If your premises have been designed, built and approved in accordance with Building Regulations, then the fire precautions forming part of the structure, such as fire doors, fire alarms and emergency lighting, should be acceptable. However, it is critical that these and other elements of the fire precautions are relevant to the risks and hazards. These other elements include the use of the building; the provision of fire fighting equipment; the training of personnel and the management and maintenance of all fire precautions.

If your organisation employs five or more people; or your premises are licensed; or an alterations notice is in force you must record the significant findings of the assessment. But it is good practice to record your significant findings in any case.

It is very important that the person carrying out the fire risk assessment is competent to do it. The law requires that where employers delegate this task to employees they must take into account their capability. Legal liability may arise on the part of both the Responsible Person and the fire risk assessor if the fire risk assessment is inadequate and people are placed at risk of serious injury or death in the event of fire.

Competence does not necessarily depend on the possession of specific qualifications. In small simple buildings and/or where the fire risk is relatively low, it is possible that an employee may study the appropriate guidance document, and with access to external help and advice, conduct a satisfactory fire risk assessment. However, for higher risk or more complex premises a higher level of knowledge and experience is required of the fire risk assessor. In this case, a risk assessor will need to have the specific applied knowledge and skills of an appropriately qualified specialist. Evidence of specialist training and experience, or membership of a professional body, can enable suitable competence to be demonstrated.

Numerous examples of inconsistencies in fire risk assessments have lead to widespread calls for a definition of competence. What is needed is a standard against which to benchmark assessors to offer safety, security, and assurance for the user.

Several professional bodies operate risk assessor registers and there are certification schemes in place for both individuals and companies. The Fire Industry Association believes that companies (including sole traders) trading in the provision of fire risk assessments should be third party certificated for the purpose. Certification should be conducted by a certification body that

The five steps to completing a Fire Risk Assessment



Step 1:
Identify the fire hazards

This means looking for sources of heat, fuel and oxygen which together might lead to a fire. You need to identify:

- Sources of ignition such as naked flames, heaters or some commercial processes
- Sources of fuel such as built up waste, display materials, textiles or over stocked products
- Sources of oxygen such as air conditioning, medicinal or commercial oxygen supplies
- You should also consider what existing measures are in place to control the hazards



Step 2:
Identify the people at risk

You will need to identify anyone who may be affected, such as:

- People working near to fire hazards
- People working alone or in isolated areas (i.e. roof spaces or storerooms)
- Maintenance staff, contractors, passers-by and people present outside normal working hours such as, cleaners and security guards
- Visitors and members of the public
- Individuals and groups who may be especially at risk, e.g. young or in experienced workers, people with mobility or sensory impairment, pregnant workers, children or parents with babies, elderly or infirm people etc.



Step 3:
Evaluate, remove, reduce and protect against fire risk

This involves evaluating the level of risk in your premises. You should remove or reduce any fire hazards where possible and reduce any risks you have identified. For example:

- Replace highly flammable materials with less flammable ones
- Make sure you separate flammable materials from sources of ignition
- Have a no smoking policy
- Ensure adequate inspection and testing of electrical installations and equipment.

When you have reduced the risks as far as possible, you must assess any risk that is left and decide whether there are any further measures you need to take to make sure you provide a reasonable level of fire safety.

The evaluation of risk will take account of the fire risk assessor's opinion of the likelihood of fire, the extent of injury that could occur and the number of people who could be affected. All equipment and systems required by legislation must be subject to suitable testing and maintenance.



Step 4:
Record, plan, instruct, inform and train

It is always good practice to record the significant findings of the fire risk assessment, the steps that you have already taken and those that you plan to take in order to reduce the risk. In many cases the law requires that the significant findings of the fire risk assessment and details of those persons especially at risk are recorded.

- Record significant findings and actions taken to remove/reduce the risk from fire
- Develop and implement an appropriate emergency plan
- Inform and instruct relevant persons on the actions to be taken in the event of fire
- Deliver training to employees, particularly those with specific duties (fire marshals).



Step 5:
Regularly review the fire risk assessment

It is always good practice to record the significant findings of the fire risk assessment, the steps that you have already taken and those that you plan to take in order to reduce the risk. In many cases the law requires that the significant findings of the fire risk assessment and details of those persons especially at risk are recorded.

- When ever you have cause to consider it is no longer valid, e.g. after a significant incident or "near miss"
- If there has been a significant change in the workplace, e.g. changes to plant, equipment, processes, or substances used etc.
- If there has been a significant change in the number, character or needs of persons who use the building

Protective Measures

So who does fire safety legislation apply to?

The risk assessment should identify a specific range of protective measures that are appropriate for the particular type of premises and usage of the premises. The combination of measures will vary with the application but the following is a list of topics that need to be considered:

- **Structural and passive fire protection**
- **Fire detection and warning systems**
- **Means of escape (escape routes), emergency escape lighting**
- **Signs and notices**
- **Fire fighting equipment and facilities**
- **Kitchen fire suppression systems**
- **Sprinkler and other water-based extinguishing systems**
- **Gaseous extinguishing systems**
- **Other fixed fire extinguishing systems**
- **Recording, planning, informing, instructing and training**

Structural and passive fire protection

Structural and passive fire protection is the primary measure integrated within the constructional fabric of a building to provide inherent fire safety and protection. In the event of fire, these measures will provide the fundamental requirements of structural stability, fire separation through building compartmentation and safe means of escape.

Local building regulations will define the regional requirements for these measures:

- **England and Wales: The Building Regulations 2010**
- **Northern Ireland: The Building Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012**
- **Scotland: The Building (Scotland) Regulations 2004, (as amended)**

Various structural and passive fire protection measures may be necessary to limit and control the spread of flame, heat and smoke from a fire. The following are some of the measures that need to be considered:

- **Structural steel protection**
- **Fire walls and partitioning**
- **Fire and smoke curtains**
- **Fire rated ductwork and dampers**
- **Fire doors**
- **Fire resistant glazing**
- **Intumescent sealing systems**
- **Cavity fire barriers**
- **Fire stopping or seals for penetration of fire barriers**

Note that penetrations of walls and floors by pipes and other services may provide a ready path for the spread of fire. The linings and decorative finishes of buildings must also be considered as linings can promote the spread and development of fire. In buildings with large areas of drapes, consideration may should be given to the flammability. Similarly, the flammability of furniture and furnishings may need to be considered. Other hazards include excessive layers of paint on the walls and ceiling of escape routes.

Ventilation and air-conditioning systems can also provide a path for the spread of fire and smoke. Measures to reduce the risk may include a combination of fire and smoke dampers, and the interconnection of forced ventilation and air-conditioning systems to the fire alarm system.

Further information on these products and systems contact Infinite Fire & Security on 01226 337898, or visit www.infinitefiresecurity.co.uk

Need help with your Fire Risk Assessment?

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