

Fire Risk Assessment

Introduction

Achieving fire safety is often a matter of common sense but you have to ensure that sufficient time is put aside to work through the necessary steps. In more complicated premises or those with a high life risk, such as premises that provide care or large cinemas, more expert help may be required. Effective fire safety management requires any person who exercises some level of control in premises (the responsible person) to take reasonable steps to reduce the risk from fire and ensure occupants can safely escape if a fire does occur.

What Legislation is Applicable

The Regulatory Reform Fire Safety Order 2005 (the Order) applies to virtually all premises and covers nearly every type of building, structure and open space.

For example:

- Offices and shops
- Premises that provide care
- Community halls
- The common areas of houses in multiple occupation
- Pubs, clubs and restaurants
- Schools
- Tents and marquees
- Hotels and hostels
- Factories and warehouses

The Order specifically excludes purely domestic premises occupied by a single-family group. Other applicable legislation is referenced at the end of this document.

The Main Requirements of the Order

The responsible person is required to:

- Carry out or nominate someone to carry out a fire risk assessment identifying the risks and hazards
- Consider who may be especially at risk
- Eliminate or reduce the risk from fire as far as is reasonable practical and provide general fire precautions to deal with any residual risk
- Take additional measures to ensure
- Create a plan to deal with any emergency and, in most cases, document your findings

- Review your findings as necessary

Responsibilities

Under the Order, anyone who has control in a building or anyone who has a degree of control over certain areas or systems may be designated a “responsible person” for example:

- The employer for those parts of premises they have control over
- The managing agent or owner for common parts of a premises or common fire safety equipment such as fire warning systems or sprinklers
- The occupier of premises that are not workplaces such as a chairperson in a parish hall
- Any other person who has some control over a part of a premise may be the responsible person in so far as that control extends. Although in many premises the responsible person will be obvious, there may be occasions when a number of people have some responsibility.

Complying with the Order

If you are the responsible person you must ensure a fire risk assessment is carried out although you can delegate this task to somebody else. However you will still remain responsible, in law, for complying with the Order.

The responsible person, either on their own or in co-operation with any other responsible person must as far as is reasonably practical, ensure that everyone on the premises can escape safely in the event of a fire. It includes people who may have a disability or anyone who may need special assistance.

Fire certificates will no longer be issued and those previously in force will have no legal status. It would be good practice to use the old fire certificate as a starting point for a fire risk assessment. The Order requires that the responsible person take ownership of the management of any risk in their premises.

If you employ 5 or people your risk assessment must be documented.

If your premises have been designed and built, and are being used in accordance with modern Building Regulations then your structural fire precautions should be acceptable. You will still need to carry out a fire risk assessment and ensure that your risk reduction, fire prevention and maintenance routines are sustained.

A checklist can be used as an aide memoire to assist in completing the risk assessment or as a management tool for assessing internal arrangements for managing fire safety. An example Checklist for Fire Safety can be found in the document library. In addition, a separate risk assessment form itself should be completed. An example risk assessment form suitable for use in small buildings, with a simple internal layout, e.g. small offices, shops or industrial units is included in the document library - Fire risk Assessment form. In buildings with complicated escape arrangements, large numbers of people or high fire risk processes a more comprehensive fire risk assessment may be necessary. Further information and advice should be obtained from the Adviceline in this instance.

5 Steps of Fire Risk Assessment

Step 1: Identify the fire hazards within your premises

You need to identify:

- Sources of ignition such as naked flames, electrical sources, heaters or some commercial processes
- Sources of fuel such as accumulated waste, display materials, textiles or overstocked products
- Sources of additional oxygen such as forced air circulation or medicinal or commercial oxygen supplies or certain chemicals

Step 2: Identify people at risk

You will need to identify those people who may be especially at risk such as:

- People working in close proximity to fire hazards
- People working alone or in isolated areas (such as roof spaces or storerooms)
- Children or parents with babies
- The elderly or infirm and people who are disabled
- Consider the overall number of persons within the building.

Step 3: Evaluate, remove, reduce and protect from risk

Evaluate the level of risk in your premises. You should remove or reduce hazards where possible and reduce any risks you have identified, e.g.

- Replace highly combustible materials with less combustible ones
- Ensure adequate separation between combustibles and ignition sources
- Operate a safe smoking policy
- Removal of ignition sources.

When you have reduced the risk as far as possible you must assess the residual risk and decide whether there are any further measures you need to provide to ensure a reasonable level of fire safety.

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

In this step you should record, plan, instruct, inform and train. You will need to record the hazards and people you have identified as especially at risk in **Step 1** and **Step 2**. You should also record what you did about it in **Step 3**. A simple plan can help you achieve this. You will also need to make an emergency plan, tailored to your premises. It should include the actions that need to be taken in the event of a fire in your premises or any adjoining premises. Staff, and occasionally others, such as hotel guests or volunteer stewards will need to be provided with instructions. All employees should receive adequate information and training about the risks in the premises. Some, such as fire marshals, will require more thorough training.

Step 5: Review

You should make sure your fire risk assessment is up to date, you will need to re-examine your fire risk assessment every time there is a significant change to the level of risk in your premises. This could include an increase in the storage of combustible materials, a night shift starting or a change

in the type of people using your premises. It is recommended that this document is reviewed on an annual basis

The General Fire Precautions you may need to take

It is not possible in this short note to give detailed guidance for every type of premises. The minimum you should consider will include:

A Fire Detection and Warning System

- You must have suitable fire detection and warning system. This can range from a shouted warning to a comprehensive smoke detection and warning system.
- Whatever system you have it must be able to adequately warn people in all circumstances.

A means for Fighting a Small Fire

- Multipurpose fire extinguishers with a guaranteed shelf life may be acceptable in certain circumstances
- As a rule of thumb you should have one extinguisher for every 200m² of floor space with a minimum of one per floor

Safe Routes for People to Leave the Premises

- The ideal situation is when there is alternatives escape routes from all parts of the premises, although this is not always possible
- Where only one route is available other compensatory features may be necessary e.g. making corridors a fire resisting route or installing automatic fire detection
- The stairway and area near the exit should be kept clear of combustibles and obstructions.
- The escape route should lead to a final exit.
- Where the stairway is not fire resisting, the final exit should be visible and accessible from the discharge point of the stairway at ground floor level.
- High-risk rooms do not generally open directly into a fire-resisting stairway.
- If your fire risk assessment shows that people using any floor would be unaware of a fire you may require additional fire-protection measures, e.g. an automatic fire-detection and warning system.

Escape Route	Suggested Range of Travel Distances
Where there is more than one escape route	25m in high fire risk areas 45m in medium fire risk areas 60m in low fire risk areas
Where there is only a single escape route	12m in high fire risk areas 18m in medium fire risk areas 25m in low fire risk areas

The above guidelines should be used with caution. You must look at each part of the premises and decide how quickly people would react to a warning of fire. If you are in any doubt or your premises provide care or sleeping facilities, you should consult the more detailed guidance published by the Government or seek expert advice.

Suitable Fire Exit Doors

- Fire exit doors and any doors on the escape routes should be operable without a key and without specialist knowledge
- In public buildings push (panic) bars or push pads may be required

Other Matters to Consider

- Adequate lighting, (you may have to consider emergency lighting)
- Suitable fire safety signs in all but the smallest premises
- Training for your staff or anyone else you may reasonably expect to help in the event of a fire
- A management system to ensure that fire safety systems are maintained. Some very small and simple premises may be able to satisfy all these steps without difficulty but you should still be able to demonstrate that an appropriate process has been carried out.

Enforcement of the Order

Fire authorities are the primary enforcing agency for all fire safety legislation in non-domestic premises, regardless of use. They will target their resources and inspections at those premises that present the highest risk. All fire authorities will continue to address complaints about fire safety, undertake post fire investigations where poor fire safety matters are discovered and may carry out targeted or sampling inspections.

Where breaches of the Order occur the fire authority will provide practical advice or, where the risk is serious, formal notices. Except in the most serious of cases, the fire authority will work in partnership with the responsible person in order to achieve a satisfactory level of fire safety.

Where there is a very serious life risk the fire authority is able to issue a notice preventing the premises being used for certain things, (such as sleeping) or prohibiting all or part of the premises being used at all.

In all cases there will be a right of appeal, both informally and formally. An informal appeal, normally to a more experienced fire safety manager, can sometimes identify a different method of complying with the Order. If this is unsuccessful, you can appeal formally to a Magistrate. There will also be the opportunity to agree to go to an informal tribunal to agree a remedy where a notice relates to technical issues.

If you Make Changes to your Premises

In most cases you will be able to make changes to your premises but, you must remember that you will be responsible for managing the risk you create and you will still have to comply with the planning process and Building Regulations. You will need to revisit your fire risk assessment and look at how the changes will affect the risk in your premises, assess if your risk management measures are adequate and if you need to adopt further measures.

In some higher risk premises, for example, those in which the risk to life can be said to be higher than normal or where particularly complicated fire safety arrangements are required, the fire authority will be able to issue an 'alterations notice'. An alterations notice can require a responsible person to inform the fire authority of any changes they intend to make to premises where those changes would create a significant increase in the risk.

Overview

- Responsible person to review existing fire safety management arrangements
- Review / Carry out a Fire Risk Assessment

- Appoint a 'Competent Person' to help undertake preventative and protective measures
- Record the findings of your assessment.
- Effectively communicate to employees the risks identified, together with the prevention and protective measures in place
- Maintain Fire Precautions
- Ensure fire protection systems are of good quality, fit for purpose and well maintained by third party certificated companies
- Regularly review the Fire Risk Assessment and revise it when necessary

Further Guidance and References

Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005

Fire (Scotland) Act 2005

Fire & Rescue Services (N. Ireland) Order 2005

P.A.S. 79 Fire risk assessment – Guidance and recommended methodology