

Fireco

Compliance Made Easy

The simple guide to fire safety in the office



The cost of an office fire can be huge. Lives are at risk. Fire damage is not only costly to repair, it causes disruption.

Every workplace is different and has its own fire safety needs. Our booklet will guide you through the steps you need to take to minimise the risk of fire, and how to keep everyone safe if fire does break out.

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1

Who is responsible for fire safety?



The person in charge of fire safety is known as the Responsible Person. This is the employer, owner of the premises or person who controls the premises.



TIP If the Responsible Person does not have the time or expertise to do a fire risk assessment, they can appoint a Competent Person in their place, such as a professional risk assessor.

What are the duties of the Responsible Person?

- ✓ Take all reasonable fire safety precautions to ensure the safety of staff
- ✓ Carry out a fire risk assessment of the premises to be reviewed regularly
- ✓ Eliminate or reduce dangerous substances
- ✓ Make sure premises have appropriate firefighting and fire detection equipment
- ✓ Keep all routes to fire exits clear
- ✓ Carry out fire drills and have the right procedures in place
- ✓ Appoint enough people to manage fire safety, i.e. fire wardens
- ✓ If dangerous substances are used, make sure they are safely used and stored
- ✓ Ensure all fire systems are maintained, e.g. smoke alarms, fire alarms etc, so they are all in working order
- ✓ Communicate fire safety procedures to all employees and visitors
- ✓ Make sure all employees receive the necessary fire safety training.



2

How to complete a fire risk assessment

All workplaces must complete a fire risk assessment. This needs to be updated regularly. Fire risk assessments identify what precautions are needed to prevent fire.

They also need to identify what happens if a fire does break out, and how people can evacuate easily and safely.



You will need to:

- Ensure procedures are in place to reduce the likelihood of fire
- Maintain fire detection and alarm systems
- Ensure employees are familiar with emergency evacuation procedures.



It is important that:

- Fire risk assessments are kept up-to-date
- Fire precautions remain current and adequate (they should be reviewed in detail when significant alterations are made to your building).

Five-step risk assessment checklist

1

Identify fire hazards



How could a fire start and what could burn? Keep sources of ignition and fuel apart.



Examples of sources of ignition:

- Faulty or misused electrical equipment
- Cooking equipment
- Fixed or portable heaters



Potential sources of fuel:

Anything that burns is fuel for a fire.

- Flammable liquids and chemicals
- Paper, books, clothing
- Waste and litter products



Potential sources of oxygen:

- Air conditioning

2

Identify anyone at risk

Everyone is at risk of fire, though some are more at risk than others. Pay particular attention to:



- ✓ People working near to fire dangers
- ✓ Employees who work alone or in isolated areas (such as roof spaces or storerooms)
- ✓ People who are unfamiliar with the premises, e.g. visitors
- ✓ People with disabilities



TIP Try the **SIMPLE** method to reduce, and protect from, risk.

- **S** Store stock safely
- **I** Identify alarm points
- **M** Make sure fire doors are closed
- **P** Place things that catch fire away from things that cause fire
- **L** Let someone know if you spot danger
- **E** Ensure everyone knows what to do if there's a fire.

2

How to
complete a fire
risk assessment

3

Evaluate, remove, reduce and protect from risk

Look critically at your workplace and try to identify any accidents waiting to happen and any acts or omissions which might allow a fire to start. What are the risks of a fire starting and what are the risks to people in the building?

It is essential that the means of escape and other fire precautions are adequate to ensure that everyone can evacuate to a place of safety.

Remove and reduce risks — how can you avoid accidental fires? Take action to protect everyone in the building from fire. Make sure people on upper floors are able to escape if there is a fire on the lower floor.

Ensure measures are in place to prevent the spread of fire and that fire doors are kept closed and not wedged open.



TIP You can hold your fire doors open legally and safely with certain devices which automatically release the doors to close when the fire alarm sounds.

4

Record, plan, inform, instruct and train

Keep a record of hazards and how you've reduced them.

You need a clear plan of how to prevent fire and how you'll keep people safe if there is a fire. Ensure all staff know what to do in case of fire.



5

Regularly revisit the fire risk assessment in case it needs updating

Always keep your risk assessment under review. If anything changes, make a note of it in your plan and re-train staff if necessary.



See the back of this e-book for a checklist to record your findings.

3

Emergency evacuation plan



All businesses need an emergency plan. It must clearly explain the procedure to follow if a fire breaks out.

The following should be communicated to staff:

1

What to do if they discover a fire

Raise the alarm and contact the emergency services. If the fire is small enough it may be able to be extinguished (**see firefighting equipment**) but safety always comes first. If in doubt, evacuate.

2

What to do if they hear the fire alarm

Leave as quickly as possible by the designated emergency route. Fire wardens have additional duties and responsibilities if the alarm rings, this is covered later in this eBook.

3

Escape routes, refuges and exits, especially those not in regular use

These need to be clearly signed and emergency doors must be easy to open. Evacuation routes must be clear of boxes, tables, or storage of anything, even temporarily. Drills need to be undertaken once a year (minimum) so people are familiar with the evacuation route.

4

How to raise the alarm

Where are the fire alarm call points? How are they used?

5

Who calls the fire and rescue service

This needs to be done as soon as possible. This is often a responsibility of the fire warden(s).

6

Provisions for people with disabilities

If a member of staff requires additional assistance, ensure they have a Personal Emergency and Evacuation Plan (PEEP) which clearly explains how they will evacuate.

7

Evacuation procedures, guide to exits, make sure you're clear of the building



Fire exit routes should be as short and direct as possible and clearly signed. Emergency lighting should be in place if necessary. All staff must know the exit route and where the safe meeting point is once they have evacuated. Make sure there is an emergency evacuation map clearly displayed on each floor.



What happens if there is a fire?

- Act quickly. Alert everyone, get together and take your planned route out
- Don't waste time saving valuables
- Use the back of your hand to test to see if a door is warm before opening, as the fire may be on the other side
- Don't investigate the fire unless trained to do so
- If there's smoke, keep as low as possible
- Close any open doors behind you
- If you're trapped in a fire, get behind a fire door and block the bottom of the door with a towel, sheets or clothing to prevent smoke getting through
- Call 999
- Don't go back into the building.

Evacuation plans need to be visible, fire exit signs need to be clear and people must know who to speak to if they spot something they think could be dangerous. If everyone knows what is unsafe and needs to be dealt with, the risk of fire is reduced.

4

Fire safety training



A well planned emergency evacuation procedure is essential, but only works if everyone in your building has been trained in fire safety. Education is key. Make sure everyone receives regular training and understands the importance of fire safety.

Employers are required by law to provide information, instruction and training to employees about fire precautions in the workplace.

How often is fire safety training needed?

The law says that fire drills need to be done, as a minimum, once a year. However all employees must do a drill at least once a year, so you may need to do more than one if people are not in on drill day or if new employees are hired.



TIP Once a year is the bare minimum. It's best to do regular fire drills to test and fine-tune the evacuation process.

Fire drills need to be recorded in the fire risk assessment. If any particular risks or hazards are identified, these also need to be noted and steps taken to remove these.

All employees need fire safety training on their first day.

When it comes to firefighting equipment, employees need to know where the equipment is stored and how to use it. In larger premises only specific staff (fire wardens) need to be trained.



Types of fire extinguishers



Water. This is marked with a red stripe. Can be used on any fire involving wood, fabrics, paper, plastics and coal (**class A fires**). Water must never be used on electrical fires.



Foam. Cream stripe. Also for class A fires, but can also be used on fires caused by flammable liquids such as spirits and petrol (**class B fires**).



Carbon dioxide. Black stripe. Can be used on electrical fires and flammable liquids (**class B**).



Dry powder. Blue stripe. This can be used on all types of fire **EXCEPT** those involving cooking oils, e.g. a deep fat fryer fire. This is the only type of extinguisher that can be used for flammable gas and flammable metal fires (**class C and class D**).



Wet chemical. Yellow stripe. Can be used on class A fires and those involving cooking fats and oils (**class F**).

Fire blankets are for use on small fires, usually those involving fat, oil or grease in cooking areas.

Fire wardens

Fire wardens are not only needed when the alarm rings, they're also needed to check the building regularly to ensure it is as fire safe as possible. However it is helpful if all employees know what risks to look out for to minimise the possibility of fire.

Wardens also need to carry out fire drills and fire safety training for new employees, and test smoke alarms weekly.

Fire warden duty

Fire wardens play a vital role in a company's fire emergency plan. They make sure that everyone is prepared should an emergency situation occur.



If a fire alarm sounds, fire wardens:

- ✓ Raise the alarm
- ✓ Contact the emergency services
- ✓ Direct everyone to leave the building using the nearest and most appropriate exits
- ✓ Help those that need extra assistance, such as disabled people or pregnant women
- ✓ Make sure exit doors are clear of obstructions
- ✓ Check all areas to ensure everyone has evacuated
- ✓ Tackle small fires with fire extinguishers, though only if this does not put them at any risk
- ✓ Close all doors behind them to prevent the spread of fire and smoke
- ✓ Guide everyone to the assembly point and check that everyone has arrived safely with a roll call.



How many fire wardens are needed?

In a normal risk premises the following applies:

Fewer than 20 employees: At least **one fire warden**

20-75 employees: At least **two fire wardens**

For every additional **75**: One additional **fire warden**

It's important to remember that all shifts must be adequately covered, so you may have to nominate additional fire wardens to ensure there are enough for each shift.

5

Fire prevention



Fire safety education isn't just about what to do when the fire alarm sounds. It's also about the prevention of fire, and methods to minimise harm and damage if a fire does break out. Prevention is the best form of firefighting. Training can stop fires happening.



Employers are legally required to provide information, instruction and training to employees about fire precautions in the workplace. What are the four steps that need to be covered?

- Basic fire prevention
- Good housekeeping
- Risk awareness
- Smoking policy

Basic fire prevention

It's important to improve fire safety culture to prevent fire in the workplace. Educate your staff about what is a fire hazard, and make sure they know who to speak to if they spot something they think could be dangerous. Education is key. If people know why they shouldn't do something, such as block evacuation routes or wedge open fire doors, they're more likely to stop doing it.



Fire spreads quickly. Evacuation routes need to be kept clear so people can leave the building immediately. Fire doors are specially designed to hold back fire for a certain amount of time, so people can exit safely and the emergency services can tackle the fire. If fire doors are wedged open they can't do their job, and fire and smoke will continue to spread rapidly.

Risk awareness

As outlined earlier, all businesses need a fire risk assessment which must be regularly checked and updated. Staff can help with this if they know what to look for. Has anything changed in the building that might cause a fire hazard? Has something blocked a fire exit? Has an important member of staff left? Is more training required?

It's important that the person that completes the fire risk assessment is familiar with the day-to-day running of the building. People need to be taught to look after their building and its individual needs.



TIP It's important for risk assessments to be ongoing; if something is spotted it needs to be noted down in the risk assessment. During a fire drill, if someone noticed that an evacuation route was difficult to use, for example, the plan would need to change.



Housekeeping

A neat and tidy building creates a more pleasant environment and can also help prevent fires.

- ✓ Keep anything that can catch fire away from anything that can cause fire, such as a stove or a heater.
- ✓ Tumble dryers are a common cause of fire. If your building has one, ensure that the lint tray is cleaned daily.
- ✓ Never overload an extension cord or outlet. If a cord has any frayed wiring, it needs to be replaced.
- ✓ Keep clutter away from fire exits and firefighting equipment. If something is blocking an exit route it must be removed immediately. Also ensure electrical control panels are accessible.
- ✓ Discard fire hazards in a covered metal container and ensure the bins are emptied regularly.
- ✓ All machines should be regularly checked. Any electrical hazards should be reported and all repairs undertaken by a professional.
- ✓ Prevent arson by ensuring the building is locked and windows are closed. Report anything suspicious.

Smoking policy

Any smoking areas should be well away from the building and there must be a place to dispose of cigarettes safely. Smoking is not permitted in the workplace (apart from certain exemptions such as smoking rooms in hotels or care homes).

If you've taken all the precautions recommended, the risk to people and property is vastly reduced even if a fire does break out. Be sensible and be safe. If you see something that seems like it could be a fire risk: stop, think and act.

6

What are the penalties for not complying with regulations?



Your local fire and rescue authority visits premises to check fire risk assessment and fire prevention measures are appropriate. Fire safety officers can help with any questions you might have and help you understand the rules and how to comply with them.

If they think your fire safety measures aren't adequate, they can take action. Minor penalties can be up to £5,000. Major penalties can have unlimited fines and up to two years in prison.



Further reading

Click one of the links below for more information

[Government guide to fire safety in the workplace](#)

[A short guide to making your premises safe from fire](#)

[London Fire Brigade guide to fire safety training](#)



1. Fire hazards

Have you found anything that could start a fire?

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Have you found anything that could burn?

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2. People at risk

Who could be at risk?

Who could be especially at risk?

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3. Evaluate and act

Have you assessed the risks of fire in your workplace?

Have you assessed the risk to staff and visitors?

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Have you kept any source of fuel and heat/sparks apart?

If someone wanted to start a fire deliberately, is there anything around they could use?

Have you removed or secured any fuel an arsonist could use?

Have you protected your premises from accidental fire or arson?

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How can you make sure everyone is safe in case of fire?

Will you know there is a fire?

Do you have a plan to warn others?

Who will make sure everyone gets out?

Who will call the fire service?

Could you put out a small fire quickly and stop it spreading?

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How will everyone escape?

Have you planned escape routes?

Have you made sure people will be able to safely find their way out, even at night if necessary?

Does all your safety equipment work?

Will people know what to do and how to use equipment?

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4 Record, plan and train

Have you made a record of what you have found and action you have taken?

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Have you planned what everyone will do if there is a fire?

Have you discussed the plan with all staff?

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Have you

Informed and trained people (practised a fire drill and recorded how it went)?

Nominated staff to put in place your fire prevention measures and trained them?

Made sure everyone can fulfil their role?

Informed temporary staff?

Consulted others who share a building with you, and included them in your plan?

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5. Review

Have you?

Made any changes to the building inside or out?

Had a fire or near miss?

Changed work practices?

Begun to store chemical or dangerous substances?

Significantly changed your stock, or stock levels?

Have you planned your next fire drill?

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