

FIRE SAFETY

(See also: [Electricity\(24\)](#); [Electrical Equipment\(22\)](#); [Smoking Policies\(78\)](#))

INTRODUCTION

Whatever the nature of your business, there will always be a potential for damage or loss due to fire. People may be injured or even killed in fire-related incidents. Thousands of businesses are adversely affected by fires every year, with many suffering a complete loss of livelihood. This element will give advice on the law relating to fire safety and general guidance on fire precautions in non-factory premises.

Full and further advice should always be sought from the County Fire and Rescue Service, responsible for issuing Fire Certificates and enforcing other requirements of fire safety legislation.

THE LAW

The Fire Precautions (Workplace) Regulations 1997 (amended in 1999) and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 place responsibility on the employer to ensure safety from fire in the workplace. **These regulations require the employer to assess the likelihood of fire and its consequences for those in the workplace and take appropriate measures to reduce or eliminate the risk.** In the case of the workplace having 5 or more employees, the employer must record the significant findings of the risk assessment and identify any groups of people who are especially at risk.

The workplace includes any place within the premises to which employees have access, such as any room, lobby or corridor and staircase, as well as any road used as a means of entering or leaving the workplace.

A **fire certificate** is required for any premises used as a hotel or boarding house if sleeping accommodation is provided for more than 6 persons (whether guests or staff) or where there is some sleeping accommodation above the first floor or below the ground floor. A fire certificate is also required in respect of **factory premises** in or under which certain **explosive or highly flammable materials** are used or stored (depending on kind and quantities).

Practical guidance on fire precautions in certificated and non-certificated premises is given in two separate documents (Guide and Code of Practice respectively) available from HMSO (see References/Further Details)

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COMMON CAUSES OF FIRE

1. Electricity - neglect and misuse of wiring and electrical appliances.
2. Refuse/rubbish - accumulating in work/storage areas.
3. Smoking - discarded cigarettes, matches, inadequate ashtrays.
4. Heaters - Portable heaters can be knocked over, poorly sited or inadequately guarded. All heaters could overheat if obstructed.
5. Hazardous goods - includes materials such as paints, adhesives or other chemicals.
6. Arson - by mischievous children and adult fire raisers, facilitated by ineffectively secured buildings.
7. Specific hazards - machinery in dusty environments, heated equipment (e.g. soldering irons), blow lamps, cutting and welding equipment, flammable liquids.

CONSIDERATIONS

1. Fire Precautions

NB - These will usually be specified in the fire certificate (where required) or as guidance for exempted premises, found in the Code of Practice.

i. Means of escape - routes; exits; marking of fire exits; emergency and escape lighting; fire doors should never be wedged open and their self-closing devices should be checked regularly.

ii. Routes and emergency exits and the exits themselves should be kept clear. Exits should not be so locked that they cannot be opened easily in the event of an emergency.

iii. Emergency doors should open in the direction of escape and sliding or revolving doors should not be used for emergency exits.

iv. Fire warning systems - required for certificated premises; a prudent precaution for exempted premises; regular tests and records of these to be kept; any system should be suitable for the premises.

v. Means of fire fighting - appropriate types of equipment and places where it is to be provided; need to ensure appropriate types and numbers of extinguishers to deal with different fire risks according to the size of the building, physical and chemical properties of substances present and the maximum number of people present at any one time. Fire fighting equipment should be easily accessible and simple to use.

vi. Contacting emergency services- suitable arrangements must be put in place.

2. Training Staff

For certificated premises this may be specified in the certificate. Induction training is particularly important. Practical training can be supplemented by additional written instructions and all training should be logged. Employers should nominate employees to implement measures for fire fighting and provide them with adequate training, information and equipment.

Practice fire drills should be carried at least once a year, and perhaps more frequently for larger premises. The use of appointed 'fire wardens' to supervise and review evacuation exercises is recommended.

3. Fire Instruction Signs / Notices

Emergency routes and exits must be indicated by signs. Emergency routes requiring illumination should be provided with emergency lighting of adequate intensity should normal lighting fails. It is good practice to have printed notices displayed in conspicuous positions in all parts of the premises detailing the action to be taken in the event of fire.

4. Staff Considerations

All staff should be consulted (or their elected representatives or appointed trade union representatives) about your proposals when setting up fire precautions.

You must inform and co-operate with other employers who may share the same building.

Account should be taken of the less able-bodied, wheelchair users and those with impaired mobility, staff with impaired vision or impaired hearing and staff with learning difficulties.

Your employees are legally required to co-operate with you to ensure the safety of the workplace and not do anything that places anyone at risk.

5. Alterations

Before carrying out structural alterations or changes to fire alarm systems it may save you time and expense to consult with your local building control officer and/or Fire Prevention Officer.

6. Maintenance

Fire precautions equipment and devices should be subject to a suitable system of maintenance in order to ensure they remain in efficient working order and good repair.

7. Common Parts

If you have control over parts of a premises occupied by more than one workplace, but do not employ anyone yourself, you are nevertheless responsible for ensuring that the Fire Regulations are complied with in the areas under your control.

CHECKLIST - FIRE SAFETY

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| 1. Have you sought the advice of your local Fire Prevention Officer? | YES | NO |
| 2. Do your premises require a fire certificate? | YES | NO |
| 3. Have you obtained, and fully comply with the requirements of, your fire certificate? | YES | NO |
| 4. For non-certificated offices and shops, do you provide reasonable means of escape and means for fire fighting? | YES | NO |
| 5. Have you an established set of fire precautions, including means of escape in case of fire, a fire warning system, means for fire fighting and fire instruction notices? | YES | NO |
| 6. Do you train your staff in matters of fire safety? | YES | NO |
| 7. Have you taken into account all your staff in emergency procedures? | YES | NO |
| 8. Are your extinguishers regularly serviced? | YES | NO |
| 9. Do you maintain your electrical system and appliances adequately? | YES | NO |
| 10. Do you have an accepted policy with regard to (no) smoking at work? | YES | NO |

REFERENCES/FURTHER DETAIL

- *1. Fire Safety At Work (HMSO 1996) ISBN 0 11 3411 61 8
- 2. Guide to fire precautions in existing places of work that require a fire certificate (HMSO)
- 3. Code of practice for fire precautions in factories, offices, shops and railway premises not required to have a fire certificate (HMSO)
- *4. Fire Safety for Small Businesses (Fire Protection Association)
- *5. The Fire Precautions (Workplace) Regulations 1997. S.I. No. 1840

* Available to view by prior arrangement at Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council, Environmental Health Services, Council House, Coton Road, Nuneaton. CV11 5AA

** Free copy available from Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council at the above address.

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