

Fire Risk Inspections

Introduction

The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005, applicable to England and Wales removed the need for fire certificates to be issued by Fire fighter professional inspectors and placed the responsibility with employers to ensure that Fire Risk Assessments are carried out, taking account how users are using buildings and designate a 'responsible person' to provide and maintain 'adequate and sufficient' risk assessments. Employers should take account all significant fire hazards and then take reasonable precautions to avoid or control these risks.

Legal and other standards for prevention and control of fire hazards:

- The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (RRFSO)
- The Dangerous Substances and Explosive Atmospheres regulations 2002 (DSEAR)
- The Building Regulations 2010
- The Construction (Design and Management) Regulations (CDM) 2015

Who Enforces the Regulations?

- Building Regs and CDM – Local authority
- RRFSO – Fire authority

How does Enforcement work?

In a number of different ways depending on the seriousness and likelihood of someone being harmed or made ill by a breach. It can take the form of: an Informal chat; an Informal notice; a Formal notice; a Prohibition Order and / or a Prosecution

When does Enforcement happen?

During **Scheduled Audits**, after **Incidents** or when breaches are **Reported**. *Urgent fire safety concerns like blocked or locked fire doors can be reported direct to your local fire station. They are recorded but they can be reported anonymously. They will be actioned timely, depending on the degree of seriousness.*

What can Trade Union Representatives do?

Trade Union representatives are not the 'responsible' or 'competent' person. It is not their responsibility to carry out a Fire Risk Assessment, only to have a general knowledge of what should be in it and to be able to challenge their employer on any omissions, changes, updates or concerns that they or their members have.

It is important to find out who the 'responsible' and 'competent' person is and check that they are qualified, have experience and a good knowledge to undertake the role.

There are basic things that need to be checked when a Fire Risk Inspection is conducted. In particular concentrate on 'means of escape' and 'raising the alarm'.

- Talk to members/staff, inspect at various times night and day, use a checklist but also observe workers, check documentation and records and check competency of Fire Risk Assessors
- Produce a report to be sent and discussed with management
- Involve your members in the process and ensure you report back on what you are doing
- Be involved in reviews and check Fire Risk Assessments
- Review Fire Authority and other audits
- Be consulted on building work planning and progress
- Ensure 'responsible person' is qualified, experienced and knowledgeable about your workplace
- Reviews should include changes and updates to building regulations and also reviews as a result of prosecutions or warnings issued by enforcement officers
- When an incident or near miss happens ensure it is recorded and review fire risk assessment
- If management fail to act on information of concern in the fire risk inspections then escalate to appropriate internal people and if necessary to official enforcement officers

Fire Risk Inspections:

A Fire Risk Inspection can be carried out as part of your regular quarterly inspection or by conducting a separate Fire Risk Inspection. It is worth noting that the Fire Risk Assessment should identify any possible dangers and risks, it should identify who may be especially at risk and then consider how the risk can be eliminated or reduced and then to provide general fire precautions to deal with any possible risk left. The Fire Risk Assessment should take other measures to make sure there is protection if flammable or explosive materials are used or stored and a plan to deal with any emergency. These should be recorded, reviewed

regularly and workers should be trained. This is the responsibility of the 'responsible person', who could be the employer, the managing agent or owner, the occupier or any other person who has some control over a part of the premises. It can be one person or a number of people with some responsibility. As part of your Fire Risk Inspection you will be able to examine the Fire Risk Assessment for your workplace.

Fire risk inspection should include identifying the following:

Questions to ask, should include:

Is there a fire-detection and warning system? Is this suitable and is it able to warn all people in all circumstances?
Is there an emergency evacuation plan? Is it tested and reviewed periodically and reviewed after every test or incident?
Do you have a way of fighting small fires? Are there trained staff who know how and what to use?
What is the shelf life of fire extinguishers if they are provided and are they maintained and dates for review recorded?
Is there safe egress from the building? Does everyone know how to recognise the fire alarm and what to do when it is raised?
Is there more than one escape route? Is this tested with different escape exits blocked during drills?
Is the escape route, fire and smoke protected?
What is the distance that people need to go to escape, is it the shortest possible?
Are stairways, corridors and areas near fire exits clear of obstructions and material which can catch fire?
Does the escape route lead to a final exit and safe place?
High risk rooms should not open directly into a fire-protected stairway. Is this the case?
Do you have an automatic fire-detection and warning system if people would not be aware of a fire?
How quickly will people be able to escape from a fire in all activities and places?
Are there personal emergency evacuation plans in place for people who need assisted evacuation? Are they fit for purpose and how are they tested?
Do you have suitable fire exit doors?
Are the fire exit doors able to be opened without keys or specialist knowledge?
Are any push bars or push pads suitable for the people using those premises?
Do you have emergency lighting that is working?
Are there suitable fire-safety signs?
Have all staff or anyone else accessing the property been trained in raising the alarm and means of escape?
Are all fire doors kept shut and not wedged open, especially when the rooms are not being used?
Is all this recorded and all affected people trained? When do reviews of all this take place?
Are soft furnishings maintained to ensure fire retardant is not compromised?
Does the RA identify all the hazards including dangerous substances used, where they are, who is at risk and what is in place to remove or reduce the risk? What special arrangement are in place for emergencies if there is a potential explosive risk? Is it reviewed regularly and when buildings, functions, processes and people etc. change?
What sources of fuel are there such as built-up waste, display materials, textiles, over stocked products?
What sources of oxygen are there such as air conditioning or medicinal or commercial oxygen supplies?
For existing buildings and if this is a new build or building alteration is there evidence of compliance with current Building Regs, inspection and certification details?
Are there other risks that need to be considered like the external cladding following the Grenfell fire, and what is being done about them? What type of cladding is used? Has it been tested for flammability/combustibility? If it is similar/same used in Grenfell fire, when is it being removed? Is there any change needed to the fire safety procedures because of Grenfell fire or other serious fire incidents?

Further Information:

- www.communities.gov.uk/firesafety ,
- www.hse.gov.uk
- www.thefpa.org.uk
- <https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2013/06/Briefings-and-CircularsFire-Safety-Health-and-Safety-Information-Sheet3.pdf>