

## **H&S Information Sheet #2**

## **Fire Safety**

### **Introduction**

In a typical year about 30 people will be killed and over 2500 people injured in over 30,000 fires in workplaces

Most fire deaths are caused by inhalation of smoke and toxic fumes. When set alight a large number of synthetic materials give off toxic fumes that can travel, and kill, faster than fire.

### **Fire Safety Legislation**

The Government has recently rationalised and consolidated existing law in order to make it easier for employers to understand and comply with.

The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order replaced all previous fire safety legislation in England and Wales from October 2006. Similar legislation took effect in Scotland and Northern Ireland on the same date.

The Order covers general fire precautions and other fire safety duties needed to protect 'relevant persons' in case of fire in and around most premises. It requires fire precautions to be put in place "where necessary" and to the extent that it is reasonable and practicable in the circumstances.

'Relevant persons' are defined as any person lawfully on the premises and in the immediate vicinity. This would include customers and donors as well as staff and volunteers. Particular attention should be paid to those at special risk, such as disabled people, young persons and those who have special needs.

Responsibility for complying with the Order rests with the 'responsible person'. In a workplace, this is the **employer** and any other person who may have control of any part of the premises, e.g. the owner or contractor responsible for installing and maintaining fire precautions.

### **Employers' Duties**

Employers are required to:

- Carry out a fire risk assessment of every workplace and keep a record of these assessments
- Identify the significant findings and the details of anyone who might be particularly at risk from fire
- Provide and maintain precautions to keep people safe from fire
- Provide information, instructions and training to staff about the fire precautions
- Produce a written fire emergency plan for every workplace
- Nominate people to undertake special roles identified in the emergency plan
- Consult employees about nominations to perform special roles and proposals for improving the fire precautions
- Inform other employers in the building about any significant risks which might affect the safety of their employees and co-operate with them about measures to reduce the risk
- Establish a suitable and readily available method of calling the emergency service
- Monitor and review the fire risk assessments and revise as appropriate

Finally, **employees** are required to co-operate with employers to ensure the workplace is safe from fire. They must not do anything that will place themselves or others at risk.



### Fire Risk Assessment

The same approach and principles apply to fire safety as to assessments of other occupational health and safety risks. The fire risk assessment could be part of a general risk assessment or it could be done separately.

The employer must remove hazards and manage the remaining risks to:

- Ensure that all occupants are alerted and can leave the premises safely in the event of a fire
- Reduce the probability of a fire starting
- Limit the effects should a fire occur

A step-by-step guide on how to conduct a fire risk assessment is attached to this Information Sheet along with a pro forma for recording the assessment and the significant findings. Also attached is an Action Plan for recording what needs to be done at each workplace to rectify deficiencies in fire precautions.

### Responsible and Competent Person

A competent person can be enlisted to carry out part or all of the risk assessment, but the employer always remains responsible for the outcome.

'Competence' is loosely accepted as someone with "sufficient training and experience or knowledge and other qualities necessary to properly assist in undertaking the appropriate measures".

Competence is judged in the context of the size and complexity of the workplace. A large complex factory is likely to require a safety specialist; a small shop should normally require someone who:

- Understands basic fire safety principles
- Is competent in fire risk assessment
- Has the requisite knowledge relating to the particular workplace

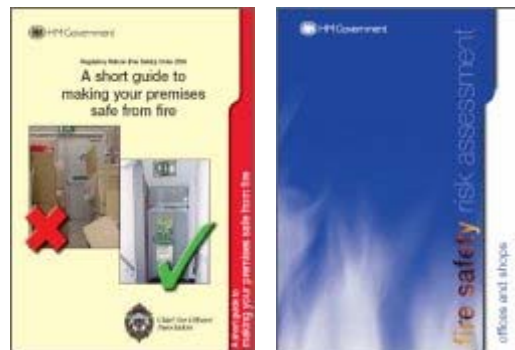
It is the Government's intention for most small and medium sized businesses to be able to have a good attempt at a fire risk assessment without needing outside help to achieve a satisfactory level of fire safety in their buildings.

CLG have a useful free guide to making your premises safe from fire available to download or order, here:

[www.communities.gov.uk/publications/fire/regulatoryreformfire](http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/fire/regulatoryreformfire)

If you wish to learn more, you may wish to read their Fire Safety Risk Assessment - Offices and Shops manual, available to download for free here:

[www.communities.gov.uk/publications/fire/firesafetyrisk2](http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/fire/firesafetyrisk2)



If the would-be assessor is still unsure after studying such information, then the fire service advise that they contact a person who is sector competent to assist them. Alternatively, they could go on a training course – such as those run by the Fire Protection Association ([www.thefpa.co.uk](http://www.thefpa.co.uk)) – in order to become more confident and better qualified.

### Meeting The Necessary Standards

Providing the premises have been built and maintained in accordance with Building Regulations, undertaking a risk assessment will be a simple matter to achieve without significant expenditure.

As part of the process of approving alterations or refurbishment works, the local authority Building Control Department and Fire Officer will assess the means of escape and fire precautions. (Control measures installed to meet the requirements of Building Regulations include fire escape staircases, fire lobbies, fire doors and emergency lighting.)

In granting approval the fire officer may impose restrictions on certain rooms which do not have adequate means of escape. There

## Safety Matters in Charity Retailing

may be a total prohibition on any use of these rooms or a restriction to out-of-season storage only. (This would allow occasional visits of short duration to collect or deposit stock, but not allow sorting to be done even on a temporary basis.)

If there is any doubt about whether a workplace has been built and maintained to these regulations, the services of a suitably qualified fire safety consultant or building surveyor should be retained.

### Fire Prevention

Standards should be set for minimising the chance of fires occurring and spreading. Staff and volunteers should receive instruction on induction, and then regular reminders, as to what is required of them to maintain these standards, such as:



- Keeping combustible materials away from heaters
- Storing combustible waste safely
- Minimising the use of multi-point adaptors
- Not smoking
- Keeping internal fire doors closed

### Fire Detection - Test Procedures

High risk premises may require the installation of fire detectors, alarm systems and emergency lighting. These need to be checked and tested regularly to ensure that they are in proper working order.

Alarm panels should be inspected daily to ensure that they are operating normally. The alarms should be activated weekly to ensure that the system is capable of operating under alarm conditions.

Additional tests should be made quarterly and annually either by the installer or by an employee who has received special training from the installer.

Emergency lighting should be inspected regularly for cleanliness and battery banks and generators should be checked following the manufacturer's instructions. Tests should be carried out monthly, six-monthly and annually.

These tests simulate a failure of the normal lighting supply. The monthly test would normally be for sufficient time to allow all lighting units to be checked for proper function. The six-monthly test would be for a continuous period of one hour and the annual test would normally last for three hours.

A record should be kept of all tests carried out to fire detectors, alarm systems and emergency lighting.

### Fire Fighting Equipment

Every workplace must have sufficient fire fighting equipment that is appropriate for the type of fire hazards present.

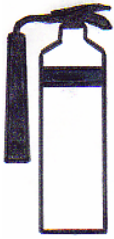
Signs are available to guide potential users on what certain extinguishers can be used for.



Different extinguishers are designed to fight different types of fire. All fire extinguishers made since 1997 are red, and each has a coloured panel near the top for identification. Those made prior to 1997 are the colour of the panel.

## Safety Matters in Charity Retailing

### CARBON DIOXIDE (CO<sub>2</sub>)



Use on flammable liquids and live electrical equipment

**After the fire is out,** ventilate the area to discharge fumes

**DO NOT USE** on wood, paper and textiles

(black panel)

### POWDER (multi-purpose)



Use on wood, paper and textiles

Use on flammable liquids

Use on gaseous fires

Use on live electrical equipment

(blue panel)

### FOAM (AFFF)



Use on wood, paper and textiles

Use on flammable liquids

**DO NOT USE** on live electrical equipment

(cream panel)

### WATER



Use on wood, paper and textiles

**DO NOT USE** on live electrical equipment or flammable liquids

(red panel)

All fire extinguishers must be easily accessible – usually either wall-mounted or on a stand on the floor. They should be

inspected monthly to ensure that they are in their proper position and have not been discharged, or lost pressure (those fitted with pressure indicator), or suffered obvious damage.

Annually, the extinguishers should be tested by the manufacturer, or a competent person following the manufacturer's recommended procedures. At the same time a discharge test should be carried out in accordance with the manufacturer's recommendations.

A record of the monthly and annual inspections and tests should be kept. This could be done by keeping a fire safety log book or by including them on other safety inspection checklists or records.

Staff must be trained in the identification and operation of fire extinguishers if they are to be displayed within the workplace. The annual service can be a convenient time for staff to receive training in how to use the fire extinguishers. Alternatively, the local fire brigade could be asked to provide this.

## Fire Evacuation

Arrangements for warning all occupants of a fire must be adequate and failsafe. For small premises a hand-bell, whistle or a single shout may be suitable.

*The Shaw Trust shops use a whistle as a fire alarm. One is kept by the counter in the sales area and one is hung on the H&S notice board in the backroom.*

Staff should be instructed and trained to ensure that they know what to do in the event of a fire and be reminded at least once a year, normally via a fire drill, of the action to take in an emergency.

*Shelter and PDSA conduct fire drills twice a year. The Shaw Trust and Save the Children UK carry out quarterly fire drills.*

Fire risks will vary from site to site. A shop with a basement and upper floors may need to conduct evacuation drills more frequently than small, single floor shops.

## Safety Matters in Charity Retailing

A record of when drills are conducted should be kept on the premises along with any action notes arising from them.

One of the main challenges facing charity shops is how to include every volunteer in these drills, given that there are usually twenty or more volunteers in a team, most of whom will only spend half a day a week in the shop. This can be addressed by adopting a system of 'Passive Fire Drills'.

A 'Passive Fire Drill' is one in which staff and volunteers are required to show that they know what the fire evacuation procedure is without setting off the alarm. They should be asked individually and, if they cannot recall it, they should be asked to read the fire notice/ emergency plan and be asked again at a subsequent date. When they have shown that they can remember the procedure, a record should be made of their name and the date.

On arrival at a fire the firefighters want to know if all occupants have been evacuated. The most secure way of providing this information is to keep a record of who is working on the premises.

*PDSA shops have a Visitors Record sheet and a separate sheet for staff. The Shaw Trust shops use an A5 diary for listing who is on the premises and for recording when fire drills are carried out.*



### Travel Distances

The travel distance is the actual distance to be travelled by a person from any point within the floor area to the nearest storey exit or final exit.

The maximum travel distance from any **occupied** part of a workplace must not be greater than 18 metres.

An occupied part of a shop would include the sales area, workrooms, office and kitchen. It would not include out of season or general storerooms and toilets.

A **final exit** is an exit from a building where people can continue to disperse in safety, and where they are no longer at danger from fire and/or smoke.

A **storey exit** is a doorway giving direct access into a protected stairway, firefighting lobby or external escape route.

**Internal fire doors** are ones that will limit the spread of fire and smoke and protect an escape route. They should be fitted with a self-closing device and be labelled 'Fire Door Keep Shut', as below:



Exit doors on escape routes and final exit doors should normally open in the direction of travel, and be quickly and easily opened without the need for a key. Fire exit doors should be checked daily to ensure that bolts and padlocks have been removed.

The assembly point in case of a fire should be a place of safety away from the building where people will not be at risk of fire, smoke or flying glass.

### Fire Safety Records

Keeping up-to-date records can help in the management of fire safety and can demonstrate compliance with fire safety law. There is no 'correct' format specified for such records, although a log book may be available from the local fire authority.

It is recommended that all fire safety records be kept together in a specified place and be available for inspection by representatives of the enforcing authority.

They should include:

- Significant findings from the fire risk assessment and any action taken
- Testing and checking of escape routes including final exit locking mechanisms such as panic devices
- Testing of fire-warning systems and periodic maintenance by a competent person
- Recording of false alarms
- Testing and maintenance of emergency lighting systems
- Testing and maintenance of fire fighting equipment
- Training of persons responsible for carrying out inspections and tests
- Fire evacuation drills
- The results of periodic safety audits and any action taken.

### Enforcement

Local fire authorities supervise and enforce fire safety regulations. Employers do not have to send a fire risk assessment to the fire authority, unless specifically requested. They just need to keep it in a safe place and up to date.

The local fire authority cannot do the risk assessment for an employer nor check whether it has been done properly. However, should an assessment indicate that significant works or expenditure is required, they will provide advice to ensure that the most effective methods of complying with the regulations are undertaken for the premises. Fire authorities will usually recommend minor improvements, with a time period for completing the work, in an informal letter.

They have formal powers for use in serious cases:

- **Enforcement Notice** requiring more important work to be done within a stipulated time period
- **Prohibition Notice** prohibiting or restricting use of the premises with immediate effect until such time as it has been made appropriately safe
- **Alterations Notice** requiring precautions to be taken at premises where any proposed changes to the building would pose a significant increase in risk

Failure to comply with these notices is a criminal offence and the fire authority may prosecute in the Courts.

### Further Reading

*Fire Safety Risk Assessment: Offices and Shops* ISBN 978 1 8511 2815 0

This can be downloaded free from the Department of Communities and Local Government website:

[www.communities.gov.uk](http://www.communities.gov.uk)

Advice for small to medium sized enterprises on completing a fire risk assessment can be obtained visiting the Fire Protection Association (FPA) website:

[www.thefpa.co.uk/Resources/Fire+Safety+Guidance/](http://www.thefpa.co.uk/Resources/Fire+Safety+Guidance/)