Fire Risk Assessment : A Step-by-Step Guide

STEP 1 **Identify Fire Hazards**	Identify the fire hazards in your workplace – and don't forget to look outside: • Any **combustibles,** such as paper, wood, cardboard, etc. Highly combustible fuels would be thinners, solvents, polyurethane foam, etc. • Any **sources of heat,** such as heating, lighting, cooking equipment, naked flames, electrical equipment • Any **unsafe acts,** such as smoking next to combustible materials • Any **unsafe conditions**: these hazards may assist a fire to spread in your workplace (e.g. large areas of hardboard or polystyrene tiles, etc. or open stairs that can cause a fire to spread quickly, trapping people and involving the whole building) Make a note of the hazards on a simple plan of the building or a checklist.
STEP 2 **Identify People at Risk**	Consider the risk to any people who may be present and especially: • Persons who are challenged (e.g. physically, visually, mentally, etc.) • Persons who are isolated or unable to react quickly • Persons who are unfamiliar with the premises (e.g. visitors and customers)
STEP 3 **Evaluate, Reduce Risks and Protect**	Attempt to classify each area as 'high', 'normal' or 'low' risk. • **Low Risk**: where the risk of fire occurring is low, or the potential for fire, heat and smoke spreading is negligible and people would have plenty of time to react to an alert of fire • **Normal Risk**: where an outbreak of fire is likely to remain confined or spread slowly, with an effective fire warning allowing persons to escape to a place of safety • **High Risk**: areas where the available time needed to evacuate the area is reduced by the speed of development of a fire. Also where the reaction time to the fire alarm is slower because of the type of person present **Reduce** the chance of a fire occurring and spreading: • Remove the hazard altogether, if you can • Reduce the hazard to the point where there is little or no risk • Replace the existing hazard with a safer alternative • Keep fuel and sources of heat apart • Keep fuel away from anyone who might want to start a fire deliberately • Develop a culture to prevent hazards occurring in the workplace Determine if the precautions in place to **protect** people are adequate: • **How will you detect a fire and warn others?** Arrangements for warning all occupants of a fire must be adequate and failsafe. Fire alarm systems, smoke detectors and alarms, hand-bells, or a single shout may be suitable depending on the size and complexity of the workplace. A phone should be available in a safe place in order to call the fire service.

	• **Will people be able to escape before the fire places them in danger?** Escape, without the use of a key, should be possible from all parts of a workplace to a place of safety in fresh air, normally within 2½ minutes. Escape routes must be well-lit, unobstructed and safe to use. • **Could a fire reach a size that could cause anyone to be trapped?** Ideally people should be able to turn their back on a fire and walk towards a fire exit. In small workplaces with a **Normal** or **Low** fire risk, there may be no need to have alternative ways out. But keep the dead end areas as short, as few and as low risk as possible. • **How will people know what to do if a fire breaks out?** Fire exits and routes must be clearly marked. Staff must know what to do if there is a fire. • **Could a fire be put out while still small?** The fire fighting equipment needs to be suitable for the hazards present, sufficient in number, adequately maintained and properly positioned (e.g. wall mounted by exits)
STEP 4 **Record, Plan and Train**	**Keep a record** of the assessment and the actions (including maintenance) arising from it in writing, or by electronic means. It should indicate: • The date the assessment was carried out and who made it • The hazards identified • Any staff or other people especially at risk • What action needs to be taken, and by when (Action Plan) **Plan** for a fire so your staff will know how to call the fire brigade and evacuate people safely to a location where they will no longer be in danger. In small workplaces an Emergency Plan may take the form of a fire action notice. Discuss the plan with staff or representatives. Nominate people to implement it and to carry out any specialist duties (e.g. assisting disabled persons). **Train** people on induction, and regularly, on what to do in case of a fire. • Keep a record of the training provided, the date and who received it • Practise a fire drill at least annually (or conduct 'passive' fire drills asking staff and volunteers to prove that they know the evacuation procedures) • Provide fire extinguisher training where appropriate Train nominated people to implement measures to prevent fires (e.g. to ensure escape routes are kept clear and unobstructed). Inform visitors and contractors of relevant procedures, especially evacuation.
STEP 5 **Monitor, Review and Revise**	**Monitor** existing fire safety arrangements continually to ensure they remain effective. Include in your regular safety inspection checklists. Set a date to **Review** the assessment. About every 3 years should be sufficient if the risks have not changed. **Revise** the assessment before then if you: • Make changes to the building either inside or out • Have a fire or 'near miss' • Make significant changes to work practices • Change significantly the type/quantity of stock or substances you keep