

## Fire Risk Assessment Process

There are twelve main duties imposed on the Responsible Person by the Fire Safety Order that contribute to the achievement and maintenance of **General Fire Precautions** in premises. These are listed below and to give you a better idea of what is expected of the Responsible Person, each one includes a brief explanation of what it means and, where appropriate, how it can be complied with.

1. **Undertake a Fire Risk Assessment and keep it under review.**

The Responsible Person now has to carry out a Fire Risk Assessment or have one carried out on their behalf by a competent person. A Fire Risk Assessment is a detailed survey of premises to identify combustible materials and ignition sources and to assess whether they are, or could be placed close enough to each other to catch fire.

When this process has been completed consideration needs to be given to the impact a fire might have on the occupants of the premises. Any residual risk therefore has to be protected against. This is particularly important where anyone could be at risk especially if they are working or located in isolated positions or are less able. If it is felt that there is a problem consideration should be given to whether the hazards can be removed altogether, moved further apart, reduced in quantity or changed for a safer equivalent.

2. **Appoint one or more competent persons to assist in carrying out any preventive or protective measures required.**

This is the next step up from asking all staff to be observant. In this case there is a need to be more specific about the fire safety tasks given to them. If a member of staff is expected to accept an appointment to assist the Responsible Person to carry out any protective or preventive measures. They or their representatives must be consulted to let them know what is expected of them and obtain their agreement.

3. **Provide employees with information on risks identified and what is being done about them.**

Following the completion of a Fire Risk Assessment, all members of staff should be provided with written details of any significant findings that might affect their safety from fire while at work. Employees need to be provided with relevant, easy to understand information on any significant risks to their safety identified during the Fire Risk Assessment, and what is being done about them. The information must also include details of fire procedures and safety drills to be followed in the event of serious and imminent danger, the identities of the people nominated to implement them and any fire fighting measures deemed necessary.

4. **Consult employees or their representative(s) about nominating people to carry out particular roles.**

Apart from appointing competent persons to assist in carrying out any preventive or protective measures, people may be nominated to carry out specific tasks if a fire should occur. Depending on the type of premises involved, this could range from calling the fire brigade, going to the alarm panel to identify the affected area and meeting the brigade when it arrives, or guiding and assisting visitors to evacuate the building. There might be lots of other tasks that could be allocated to particular individuals and that is OK as long as they or their representative(s) are consulted about it and their agreement obtained.

5. **Provide the parents of any young person you intend to employ with details of any risks identified in the risk assessment that might affect them.**

If a person less than eighteen years of age is employed, their parents must be provided with the details of anything identified during the Fire Risk Assessment process that could affect their safety whilst at work. This might simply include situations they could be placed in should a fire occur, where their youth and inexperience may make them more vulnerable than an older more experienced member of staff.

In respect of young people such things as their likely exposure to physical and chemical agents, the use and handling of work equipment, the organisation of processes and activities, the extent of safety training provided, and the risk from chemical agents, processes and work must also be taken into account.

6. **Inform contract workers of any risks relevant to them.**

If staff are employed on relatively short term contracts (e.g. agency staff) it must be ensured that they are given written details of any fire related risks they might be exposed to whilst at work. It is easy to overlook the need to provide information to such staff members, because inevitably, many of them will not have been present when similar information was given to permanent members of staff following completion of the Fire Risk Assessment.

In such cases it is wise to provide the information to the agency supplying the worker as well as to the worker themselves. Where it is the practice to engage staff directly on short-term contracts it would be beneficial to provide an induction pack containing information relating to safety and other important matters.

7. **Co-operate with any other Responsible Persons having premises within the building.**

Where a building is in multiple occupation, there is a duty placed on all parties involved (each of whom becomes a "Responsible Person" to the extent of their control over the part of the premises they occupy) to liaise and co-operate on matters of fire safety. In such circumstances the owner of the building is likely to become a Responsible Person in respect of the common parts of the building.

8. **Inform the employers of outside workers of any fire risks relevant to their employees and the preventive and protective measures taken.**

Outside workers in this sense means the workers of other employers who attend premises to carry out work or provide a service, e.g. a plumber or electrician. Where such workers are self-employed the individual themselves must be provided with the information.

9. **Consider the presence of any dangerous substances and the risk they present to relevant persons (staff and visitors).**

Generally speaking, the use of dangerous substances is, or should be, tightly controlled. The range of such substances is too vast to include in this document but they will consist of everything from cleaning materials, disinfectants and polishes etc. at one end of the spectrum, to highly flammable liquids and explosives at the other. If LPG cylinders are used for any purpose they can certainly pose a risk and even oxygen cylinders, which are far more common in some circumstances, can add to the intensity of any fire that occurs and will of course explode under certain conditions.

10. **Establish suitable means of contacting the emergency services and provide them with relevant information about dangerous substances.**

Making sure there are effective arrangements for contacting the emergency services is particularly important in the case of residential occupancies, particularly where fire is concerned. It is imperative that the Fire and Rescue Service is mobilised as soon as possible if residents/guests are to be evacuated successfully and fire damage kept to a minimum. Good, reliable means of communication, a properly laid down procedure and well trained staff are the key to this.

When the Fire and Rescue Service arrive they will expect to be provided with certain pieces of information such as, where the fire is situated, what is involved, and whether all of the residents/guests and staff are accounted for. In addition they will want to know about any dangerous substances that may be stored or lying about the premises. Remember, this should include any biological risks as well as highly flammable or explosive materials such as LPG and oxygen cylinders.

The best way to provide all such necessary information is in the form of a "fire wallet" containing plans of the premises, details of where any disabled or less ambulant residents/guests/staff are located and of course what those hazardous materials are and where they may be found. Liaison should be set up with the Local Fire Brigade to establish exactly what they would like to be made aware of. One thing is almost certain, they will not want thousands of individual premises supplying such information at the same time as this would cause an administrative nightmare, and updating such information centrally would be almost impossible. Take a look at the National Risk Assessment Registry (NRAR) which is a Fire Risk Assessment document storage facility.

[www.nrar.org.uk](http://www.nrar.org.uk)

11. **Provide appropriate information, instruction, and training to employees during working hours, about the fire precautions in the workplace.**

Having obtained lots of information about premises as a result of a risk assessment, it only becomes really useful if staff and others are made aware of the fire safety arrangements that affect them or can be affected by them. This means telling staff what and where the potential problems lie should a fire occur, what part they can play in preventing a calamity, what measures are in place to protect them and other relevant people, and the actions they should take if the worst happens. It also means providing practical training where necessary, such as the evacuation procedure, patient handling, and the use of fire fighting equipment if it is the policy of the organisation to tackle small fires in their initial stages.

Where instruction and training is provided the law requires that it be done during working hours. This can be problematical in smaller premises where low numbers of staff are involved and it is necessary to maintain staff cover. In such circumstances it is suggested that staff should be brought in on paid overtime to make up a viable number, or paid to attend a training session organised in co-operation with other similarly small organisations.

12. **Establish a system of maintenance for equipment provided in connection with fire fighting, fire detection and warning, emergency lighting and emergency routes and exits.**

Obviously, the equipment provided to safeguard the premises and occupants from fire is only any good if it works when it is needed. Will the detectors detect a fire? Will the alarm bells ring? Will the emergency lighting come on if the electricity supply fails? Can people find their way out of the building using the fire exit and directional signs provided? And will the fire extinguishers work if operated? In order to ensure that all of these things happen as they should, a system of maintenance will need to be in place.

This should include contractual arrangements with suitably competent companies or individuals to test and service those items mentioned above and where appropriate such things as the gas and electricity supplies and any portable electrical appliances. The tests and servicing should be carried out in accordance with the manufacturer or supplier guidelines. All tests and services carried out should be properly documented so that the record can be inspected by the Fire Officer when he/she/they call to check the risk assessment and an audit of your existing fire precautions.