

Independent Guide

Why do I need a fire risk assessment?



Independent workplace compliance

Introduction

For a fire to start, three elements are required; an ignition source, fuel and oxygen. A fire cannot start if one of these is missing. Therefore, it is important that steps are taken to prevent all three elements coming together. Fire safety is so important because simply put, fire kills. There are also the humanitarian costs, which can be both moral and financial. Financial costs relate to material and structural damage to buildings, business loss and potential legal costs. The economic cost of fire within England and Wales runs into billions of pounds each year.

Fire legislation

The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order (RR(FS)O) came into force in England and Wales on 1 October 2006. This also saw the repeal of many previous pieces of legislation, including the Fire Precautions Act 1971 and the need for fire certificates.

Part 1 of the RR(FS)O identifies general duties, including that of the "responsible person", "general fire practices" and premises which it is applicable to.

Part 2, articles 8-22, covers in detail the on-going requirements, including specifically in article 9 the need to carry out a risk assessment.

Risk Assessment

What is a fire risk assessment?

A fire risk assessment is a method to help determine the chance of a fire occurring in the workplace. This is accomplished by looking at the factors in your work activities and workplace which could cause harm. From this assessment precautions can be determined to ensure that risks are reduced to prevent fire from occurring.

1. Identify any fire hazards, including any sources of ignition, fuel and any work processes, which may be potential fire hazards.
2. Decide who, such as employees and visitors, may be in danger during a fire in the workplace or while they are trying to escape.
3. Evaluate the risks from the identified hazards and decide whether the existing precautions are adequate. During this stage of evaluation decisions should be made on whether action is required to remove the hazard completely, if practicable, or to control and manage the risks more effectively.
4. Record the findings and detail the actions taken, and inform all employees of these actions.
5. Review the risk assessment at regular intervals or when a change occurs in the workplace or work activities.

Who should carry out the fire risk assessment?

It is essential that the person conducting the risk assessment is competent to carry out the task and has access to relevant information and support. A competent person would be regarded as someone who is trained, experienced and skilled. If you do not feel confident that there is someone within your organisation that meets the criteria above, then you should seek help from someone with professional expertise in the field of fire risk assessments. However, it is always worth ascertaining whether the company is independent, i.e. could they be using the risk assessment to sell additional products or services? Using an independent company to conduct your risk assessment will ensure that you receive unbiased results.

How can fire risks be reduced?

There are many ways in which the risk of fire can be reduced, from simple methods such as appropriate storage of flammable materials, to maintenance of equipment. It is also important that adequate fire detection and warning systems are in place as well as appropriate means of escape. All staff should be informed, instructed, supervised and trained in fire procedures and evacuation. Reducing fire risks ultimately requires good management.

This guide is of a general nature; specific advice can be obtained from Assurity Consulting. Assurity Consulting is the UK's leading independent compliance consultancy specialising in workplace health, safety and environmental solutions. We have over 30 years' experience of helping customers of all sizes, from across all sectors, manage their compliance responsibilities, making sure that their organisation is compliant, their employees are safe, their processes are cost effective and their management team is in control.



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