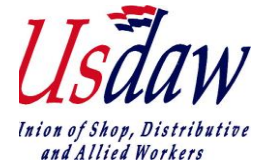




Guide To Fire Safety in the Workplace



There was a significant change to fire safety law in October 2006. This guide has been written to enable Usdaw reps and members to check that employers are complying with the new legislation. Wherever reps find employers not complying, they should first raise the matter through their employer's set procedures.

The [Regulatory Reform \(Fire Safety\) Order 2005](#) simplifies the previous legislation and requires employers and owners of premises to have a greater understanding of fire safety. A set of guides developed by the Department for Communities and Local Government inform employers what they have to do to comply with the new law. The guides help them to carry out a fire risk assessment and identify the general fire precautions they need to have in place.

The change in legislation:

- Emphasises preventing fires and reducing risk
- Makes it the responsibility of the controller of the premises to ensure the safety of everyone in and around those premises.
- Does away with the need for fire certificates

Under the previous Fire Precautions Act 1971, larger workplaces had to have a Fire Certificate that was approved by the local Fire Brigade. The Fire Certificate was a very useful document for health and safety reps because it contained information about the location of fire exits, fire fighting equipment, evacuation procedures, alarm systems, etc. Now that it is no longer required the written details of the risk assessment required under the Regulatory Reform Order will have to take its place.

The series of Government guides, 11 in total, have been developed to enable a responsible person, with a limited amount of training, to carry out a fire risk assessment. They cover a wide range of different types of public building even including sports grounds and outdoor events. Copies are available to download free from:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/fire-safety-law-and-guidance-documents-for-business>

For most Usdaw members the [guide for Offices and Shops](#) or the [guide for Factories and Warehouses](#) will be the most relevant. For members who work in shops inside large shopping centres, the guide [on Large Places of Assembly](#) may also be important.

The guides are very detailed and contain advice on risk assessment, evacuations routes and procedures, alarm systems, firefighting equipment, building design and training. However the basic approach required under the new fire safety law is the 5-step approach to risk management that health and safety reps will recognise from health and safety law.

Applying the health and safety risk assessment approach is pretty easy for most workplaces, unless there is a particular fire risk (e.g. storage of flammable substances) that needs more thought.

The 5 steps of a risk assessment

The following is a summary of the 5 steps employers should follow to carry out a fire risk assessment:

Step 1 - Identify fire hazards:

- Sources of ignition
- Sources of fuel
- Sources of oxygen.

Step 2 - Identify people especially at risk:

- Members of staff
- People not familiar with the premises
- People working alone
- Other people especially at risk e.g. disabled people

Step 3 - Evaluate, remove, reduce and protect from risks:

- Measures to prevent fires
- Measures to protect people from fire

Step 4 - Record, plan, instruct, inform and train:

- Record significant findings and actions taken
- Prepare an emergency plan
- Inform relevant people, provide instruction, co-operate and co-ordinate with others
- Provide training

Step 5 - Review:

- Keep assessment under review
- Revise where necessary

Employers should always consult with health and safety reps on the fire risk assessment and inform them of any changes.

A fire safety risk assessment checklist going through the above steps is downloadable from; <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/fire-safety-law-and-guidance-documents-for-business>

Fire authorities will be the primary enforcing agency for all fire safety legislation in non-domestic premises, regardless of use. They will target their resources and inspections at those premises that present the highest risk. All fire authorities will continue to address complaints about fire safety, undertake post fire investigations where poor fire safety matters are discovered and may carry out targeted or sampling inspections.

Where breaches of the Order occur the fire authority will provide practical advice or, where the risk is serious, formal notices. Except in the most serious cases, the fire authority will work in partnership with the responsible person in order to achieve a satisfactory level of fire safety. Where there is a very serious life risk the fire authority is able to issue a notice preventing the premises being used for certain things, (such as sleeping) or prohibiting all or part of the premises being used at all.

Fire authorities also have the power to take duty-holders to court if they are failing to manage the risk effectively. Recent court cases have resulted in large fines for breaches of the fire safety law for retailers such as the Co-op and Tesco.

General fire precautions that may need to be taken will include the following:

Housekeeping:

- Simple basic rules are often ignored particularly in retail environments, stairways, corridors and areas near the fire exits should be kept clear of obstructions and material which can catch fire.

A fire-detection and warning system

- There must be a suitable fire-detection and warning system. This can range from a shouted warning to an electrical detection and warning system.
- The warning system must be able to warn people in all circumstances.

A way of fighting a small fire

- It may be acceptable to have multi-purpose fire extinguishers with a guaranteed shelf life.
- As a rule of thumb you should have one extinguisher for every 200 square metres of floor space with at least one on each floor.

Main types of portable extinguishers

You can see the contents of an extinguisher by looking at the colour on the red body. Information signs may be on the body of the extinguisher or location point.



Fire extinguishers should conform to **BS EN 3 (1996)** for new ones or **BS 5423 (1987)** for existing ones installed before 1996.

If there are staff that are designated as fire marshals, part of their training should include training on the fire fighting equipment available and when to use it.

Last Updated June 2010