

Risk Assessment and Self Inspection

Regulatory Reform Fire Safety Order (RRFSO) 2005

The Government is committed to reducing death, injury and damage caused by fire. As part of this commitment, the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) undertook a review of the existing fire safety law and made a number of changes through the Regulatory Reform Fire Safety Order (RRFSO). Following parliamentary approval the order came into force on 1st October 2006. There are three main objectives:-

- To simplify, rationalize and consolidate the existing fire safety legislation into one set of regulations, reducing the burden on businesses and the overlap of enforcing authorities.
- To align fire safety legislation with health & safety law and reduce prescriptive requirements.
- To place the onus for fire safety for people on the 'Responsible Person' as a result of the significant findings in the 'Fire Risk Assessment' which the Responsible Person has a legal duty to carry out.

The RRFSO applies to England and Wales. A legislative regime introduced in 2006 applies in Scotland and parallels the risk-based approach of the RRFSO. Similar legislation was introduced in Northern Ireland during 2007.

The Order applies to all non-domestic premises with the exception of flats or houses in multiple occupancy (HMOs) and covers virtually every type of building, structure and open space.

The main focus of the RRFSO is on fire prevention and protection measures, with the emphasis on risk assessment.

Significant changes in legislation were made, with the major changes being:-

- The repealing of over 100 pieces of legislation, primarily relating to the Fire Precautions Act 1971 and the Fire Precautions (Workplace) Regs 1997
- Fire Certificates have been abolished and cease to have legal status
- The need to appoint a Responsible Person who must carry out a Fire Risk Assessment taking the necessary steps to reduce / remove the fire risks

Responsible Person

In this Order the 'Responsible Person' means someone who either owns the premises or business or who has control over the premises, business or activity. As a general rule the employer will have the principal responsibility but others may also have an interest e.g. landlord / tenant arrangements in multi tenanted buildings.

Where two or more persons share responsibility those responsible persons must co-operate in order to provide adequate safety measures. The Responsible Person must be able to:-

- Assess the fire risks
- Consider who may be especially at risk
- Undertake steps to reduce or remove the risks
- Ensure that any plant or substance in or on the premises is safe
- Satisfy certain requirements which include the provision of:-
 - An adequate means of escape
 - Appropriate signage
 - Emergency lighting on escape routes
 - Suitable fire fighting and detection equipment
- Undertake effective planning, organization, control & monitoring and be able to review fire safety arrangements in place
- Provide information to all occupants (not just employees) and visitors in respect of identified risks, preventative measures and the identity of the responsible person for fire safety within the premises
- Co-operate and co-ordinate with other persons sharing the premises
- Provide adequate fire safety training
- Appoint one or more 'Competent Persons' to help comply with the conditions of the Fire Safety Order

Fire Risk Assessments

Fire Risk Assessments are central to this legislation and are required in writing where 5 or more people are employed; the premises are licensed; or the Inspector, a person appointed by the Enforcing Authority (usually a Fire Officer) requires one.

Competent Person

In this Order 'Competent Person' means the appointed person must have sufficient training, knowledge and experience to carry out designated duties. This could be an employee or an external person or organization. In either instance it is important to ensure that the employee, person or organization is equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to allow them to undertake a Fire Risk Assessment.

A suitable qualification is the NEBOSH (National Examination Board in Occupational Safety and Health) General Certificate. A suitable organization would be one that is registered with the Institute of Fire Engineers as Fire Risk Assessors.

Enforcing the Order

The fire authorities are the main enforcing authority in most cases. The enforcing authority can issue Enforcement Notices and Prohibition Notices. Prosecutable offences carry penalties which include a fine or up to two years imprisonment.

The fire authority will work with you, except in the most serious cases, to provide practical help and advice to help achieve a satisfactory level of fire safety.

Support

Guidance documents and the RRFSO 2005 are available at the Department Communities and Local Government (DCLG) website:

- www.communities.gov.uk and Local Government
- Local Fire and Rescue Service
- Guidance on how a Risk Assessment should be laid out are also available through local fire authorities, DCLG and Fire Protection Association (FPA)

Self Inspection

A comprehensive self-inspection program is an integral part of effective loss prevention and compliments the RRFSO as detailed above.

An effective self-inspection program will ensure that all protection systems are in proper working order and should be able to detect potential loss conditions and include a process for corrective action.

Essentials of a self-inspection program

- Self-inspection programmes should form part of the business's Loss Prevention Programme
- The self-inspection programme should be developed by persons who are familiar with the trade occupancy and the associated hazards.

- It should be designed to identify potential fire loss conditions and ensure that all fire protection systems and equipment are in full working order; they are serviced and maintained in accordance with the manufacturer's guidelines.
- The workplace should have a policy to ensure that good housekeeping standards are attained / maintained and that management procedures are adhered to by employees. This should be well publicized in order that everybody is aware of it.
- The inspection results should be documented and submitted to the business's management for review. This is to ensure adequate corrective action is undertaken when required.
- The report should be specific to the individual facility.

Suitable Persons

The inspection should be carried out by a responsible person, who has been provided with adequate training in recognizing potential fire loss conditions or fire protection deficiencies.

The following points should be considered:-

- Employees should be familiar with the entire plant / department and its protection systems.
- Must be able to recognize common defects in housekeeping.
- Must be able to identify conditions that could increase the fire hazard or severity of a fire.
- The designated staff should have the management's full support.

Frequency

Inspections should take place weekly and take the form of a walk through of all parts of the premises including yards etc. checking for abnormal or unusual conditions.

Inspections can be extended from weekly to monthly for less hazardous occupancies.

Inspections should be performed during normal working hours, as this allows the inspection to be undertaken whilst it is operational.

Reports and Records

The findings of each inspection should be documented in the form of a report that is filed for future reference.

The report should be signed and dated by the person who completed it.

Each report should be reviewed by senior management in order that the findings can be reviewed and any action required taken.

The reports should be analyzed to identify any underlying causes, frequency of occurrence and costs of rectification. Simply correcting a reported defect over again is not the desired objective of a self-inspection program.

Any deficiencies highlighted in the report should be corrected with the minimum delay.

Monitoring the Corrective Actions

The deficiencies reported in the inspection report will probably be corrected through housekeeping or maintenance activities.

The monitoring of corrective actions can closely follow the processes associated with any other breakdown or emergency repair.

Once a deficiency has been actioned a simple report or a counter-signature of the original report by senior management is sufficient. This document should be kept on file for future audit purposes.

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