

Fire risk assessment



Fire risk assessments evaluate properties to work out the level of fire risk.

The assessment will analyse existing fire precautions and identify the need for additional measures to bring fire precautions up to a suitable standard. They help prevent material losses and business interruption, but the main reason for carrying one out is to keep people safe.

In the UK, all non-domestic sites are required by law to complete a fire risk assessment, including workplaces and any place the public have access to; as well as the common areas within multi occupancy residences.

The 'responsible person' (as defined by legislation) must make sure fire risk assessments and improvements are completed by a suitable person. This person must have sufficient training, knowledge, experience for the premises involved, and keep up-to-date records of all related activities.

Key actions when completing fire risk assessments

- Make sure fire risk assessments have been completed and are up-to-date for all premises, including outbuildings used for storage, temporary sites and structures.
 - Don't forget, you need to look at the outside areas of the buildings forming your premises, e.g. seating areas, yards, compounds and car parks.
- Select an assessor based on the needs of your premises. Make sure to check:
 - their qualifications and experience;
 - how many assessments they've undertaken for the type of premises involved;
 - they understand fire safety law (to an appropriate level), how fire develops, fire hazards and risks, how people behave around fire, the needs of vulnerable people, the general principles of fire safety and how to carry out a fire risk assessment; and-
 - they're registered with a professional organisation and or are certificated as fire risk assessors (if you're engaging an independent person or firm).

- Establish how the building is occupied and used and ensure the assessor knows all the relevant information to carry out the assessment, such as details of manufacturing processes, hazardous materials, and any other health and safety risk assessments which may be relevant.
- Identify how the buildings were constructed and any means of limiting fire and smoke spread.
- Find out the number of people likely to be in the building at any one time and consider:
 - how familiar they are with the building;
 - what specific arrangements for evacuating vulnerable persons and others who may require extra assistance, including individuals that might be asleep, impaired by drink/drugs, etc.; and
 - the likely reaction and behaviour of people in the building to a fire or alarm.
- Check that escape routes are appropriate (e.g. type, number, location, construction, length and width), have the right signage, light levels, and are maintained so they're never blocked.
 - Don't forget to think of smoke when planning escape routes. Seals on doors and ventilation systems may help in some scenarios.
- Assess the flammability of furniture, curtains and other furnishings.
- Estimate the time likely to be available for escape (the length of time between the fire starting and the means of escape becoming unsafe – Time A) based on the precautions in place; and the time needed for escape (the length of time it will take everyone to evacuate once a fire has been discovered and warning given - Time B). Check that Time A is greater than Time B.
- Make sure the way you warn of a fire and methods are sufficient. This might include 'voice' alarms providing direction and or flashing lights for those who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- Consider specific fire prevention and protection arrangements. These should include information on extinguishers, where the smoke control or ventilation systems are, automatic sprinkler systems, localised suppression systems, dry and wet rising fire mains, firefighting mains and firefighting lifts.
- If you share a building, obtain information about the nature of other occupants or businesses (where known), and details of their fire risk assessment.
- Include 'human factors' like training.
- Arrange testing and maintenance of fire protection equipment, management supervision and inspection of escape routes.
- The assessor and anyone identified as a 'responsible person' needs to review the assessment and create a documented action plan for improvements – these improvements must be planned in and appropriately signed off.

- Communicate the results of the fire risk assessment, subsequent reviews and the control measures in place or planned to employees and anyone else involved with the premises.
- Review assessments on a regular basis, as well as whenever the buildings' layout or construction changes or if activities, stock or occupants change.