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Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005

# A short guide to making your premises safe from fire



Chief Fire Officers'  
Association

A short guide to making your premises safe from fire

## Introduction

This booklet provides simple and practical advice to people responsible for fire safety in small and medium-sized businesses.

It provides guidance on how to make sure that you are meeting the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.

It is not a detailed guide, and it does not replace any of our more wide-ranging guides.

If you feel that you need more information, you can find details on how to get the various guides and a list of other useful reading material at the end of this leaflet.



## What is the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005?

The Government is committed to regulating only where necessary and in a way that is more suited to the needs of modern business. That is why the order was made, under the Regulatory Reform Act 2001. It replaces most fire safety legislation with one simple order. It means that any person who has some level of control in premises must take reasonable steps to reduce the risk from fire and make sure people can safely escape if there is a fire.

## What can this booklet do?

This booklet will lead you through a step-by-step process to achieve the safest possible outcome without, in most cases, the need for any specialist or formal knowledge or training.

Achieving fire safety is often a matter of common sense, but you will have to make sure that you set aside enough time to work through the necessary steps. In more complicated premises or those with many people at risk, such as care homes, hospitals or large cinemas, you may need more expert help.

## Where does the order apply?

The order applies to virtually all premises and covers nearly every type of building, structure and open space.

For example, it applies to:

- offices and shops;
- premises that provide care, including care homes and hospitals;
- community halls, places of worship and other community premises;
- the shared areas of properties several households live in (housing laws may also apply);
- pubs, clubs and restaurants;
- schools and sports centres;
- tents and marquees;
- hotels and hostels; and
- factories and warehouses.

It does not apply to:

- people's private homes, including individual flats in a block or house.

## What are the main rules under the order?

You must:

- carry out a fire-risk assessment identifying any possible dangers and risks;
- consider who may be especially at risk;
- get rid of or reduce the risk from fire as far as is reasonably possible and provide general fire precautions to deal with any possible risk left;
- take other measures to make sure there is protection if flammable or explosive materials are used or stored;
- create a plan to deal with any emergency and, in most cases, keep a record of your findings; and
- review your findings when necessary.



*Poor housekeeping*

## Who is responsible for meeting the order?

Under the order, anyone who has control of premises or anyone who has a degree of control over certain areas or systems may be a 'responsible person'. For example, it could be:

- the employer for those parts of premises staff may go to;
- the managing agent or owner for shared parts of premises or shared fire safety equipment such as fire-warning systems or sprinklers;
- the occupier, such as self-employed people or voluntary organisations if they have any control; or
- any other person who has some control over a part of the premises.

Although in many premises the responsible person will be obvious, there may be times when a number of people have some responsibility.

## How do I meet the order?

If you are the responsible person, you must make sure you carry out a fire-risk assessment although you can pass this task to some other competent person. However, you will still be responsible, in law, for meeting the order.

The responsible person, either on their own or with any other responsible person, must as far as is reasonably practical make sure that everyone on the premises, or nearby, can escape safely if there is a fire.

This is different from previous legislation in that you must consider everyone who might be on your premises, whether they are employees, visitors or members of the public, for example, at an open-air entertainment venue. You should pay particular attention to people who may have a disability or anyone who may need special help.

The order says that you must manage any fire-risk in your premises. Fire authorities no longer issue fire certificates and those previously in force will have no legal status.

You must still carry out a fire-risk assessment but any fire certificates you have may be useful as a good starting point.

If your premises have been designed and built in line with modern building regulations (and are being used in line with those regulations), your structural fire precautions should be acceptable. You will still need to carry out a fire-risk assessment and make sure that you keep up all fire precautions and maintenance routines.

## Fire safety risk assessment

### 1 Identify fire hazards

#### Identify:

- sources of ignition;
- sources of fuel; and
- sources of oxygen.

### 2 Identify people at risk

#### Identify:

- people in and around the premises; and
- people who are especially at risk.

### 3 Evaluate, remove or reduce, and protect from risk

- Evaluate the risk of a fire starting.
- Evaluate the risk to people from a fire.
- Remove or reduce fire hazards.
- Remove or reduce the risks to people from a fire.
- Protect people by providing fire precautions.

### 4 Record, plan, inform, instruct, and train

- Record any major findings and action you have taken.
- Discuss and work with other responsible people.
- Prepare an emergency plan.
- Inform and instruct relevant people.
- Provide training.

### 5 Review

- Review your fire-risk assessment regularly.
- Make changes where necessary.

**Remember to review your fire-risk assessment regularly.**

## Step 1 – Identify the hazards within your premises

You need to identify:

- sources of ignition such as naked flames, heaters or some commercial processes;
- sources of fuel such as built-up waste, display materials, textiles or overstocked products; and
- sources of oxygen such as air conditioning or medicinal or commercial oxygen supplies.



## Step 2 – Identify people at risk

You will need to identify those people who may be especially at risk such as:

- people working near to fire dangers;
- people working alone or in isolated areas (such as in roof spaces or storerooms);
- children or parents with babies; and
- the elderly or infirm and people who are disabled.

## Step 3 – Evaluate, remove, reduce and protect from risk

Evaluate the level of risk in your premises. You should remove or reduce any fire hazards where possible and reduce any risks you have identified. For example, you should:

- replace highly flammable materials with less flammable ones;
- make sure you separate flammable materials from sources of ignition; and
- have a safe-smoking policy.

When you have reduced the risk as far as possible, you must assess any risk that is left and decide whether there are any further measures you need to take to make sure you provide a reasonable level of fire safety.

## The general fire precautions you may need to take

In this short guide, it is impossible to give detailed guidance for every type of premises. However, the minimum you should consider will include the following.

### A fire-detection and warning system

- You must have a suitable fire-detection and warning system. This can range from a shouted warning to an electrical detection and warning system.
- Whatever system you have, it 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 metre squared (m<sup>2</sup>) of floor space with at least one on each floor.

## Main types of portable extinguishers

<p><b>Water</b> For wood, paper, textile and solid material fires</p> 	<p><b>Powder</b> For liquid and electrical fires</p> 	<p><b>Foam</b> For use on liquid fires</p> 	<p><b>CARBON DIOXIDE (CO<sub>2</sub>)</b> For liquid and electrical fires</p> 
<p>Do not use on liquid, electrical or metal fires.</p>	<p>Do not use on metal fires.</p>	<p>Do not use on electrical or metal fires.</p>	<p>Do not use on metal fires.</p>

You can see the contents of an extinguisher by looking at the colour on the red body.

We have not shown a halon extinguisher as no new halon production is permitted in the UK.

## Safe routes for people to leave the premises

- The ideal situation is when there is more than one escape route from all parts of the premises, although this is not always possible.
- If only one route is available, you may need to make it fire-resisting (protected) or install an automatic fire-detection system.
- The distance people need to go to escape (the travel distance) should be as short as possible. The travel distance should be measured from the farthest point in a room to the door to a protected stairway or, if there is no protected stairway, to the final exit from the building.
- If there is only one escape route, the travel distance should not normally be more than 18 metres. This distance should be shorter (12 metres or less) in any parts of the premises where there is a high chance of a fire starting or spreading quickly. The distance can be longer (up to about 25 metres) where the chance of a fire starting or spreading quickly is very low.
- If there is more than one escape route, the travel distance should not normally be more than 45 metres (around 25 metres in areas where the risk of fire is high and about 60 metres in areas where the risk of fire is very low).
- Stairways, corridors and areas near the fire exits should be kept clear of obstructions and material which can catch fire.
- The escape route should lead to a final exit and a safe place.
- If the stairway is not protected, the travel distance should be in line with those suggested above for single escape routes and the final exit should be easy to see and get to from the stairway at ground-floor level.
- High-risk rooms should not generally open directly into a fire-protected stairway.
- If your fire-risk assessment shows that people using any floor would not be aware of a fire, you may need other fire-protection measures, for example, an automatic fire-detection and warning system.

You should follow the above guidelines with caution. You must look at each part of the premises and decide how quickly people would react to a warning of fire. If you are in any doubt or your premises provide care or sleeping facilities, you should read the more detailed guidance published by the Government or get expert advice. Some factories and warehouses can have longer distances to travel to escape the fire.

### **Suitable fire exit doors**

- You should be able to use fire exit doors and any doors on the escape routes without a key and without any specialist knowledge.
- In premises used by the public or large numbers of people, you may need push (panic) bars or push pads.

### **Other things to consider**

- Whether you need emergency lighting.
- Suitable fire-safety signs in all but the smallest premises.
- Training for your staff or anyone else you may reasonably expect to help in a fire.
- A management system to make sure that you maintain your fire safety systems.

Some very small and simple premises may be able to satisfy all these steps without difficulty. However, you should still be able to show that you have carried out all the steps.

### **Step 4 – Record, plan, instruct, inform and train**

In this step you should record, plan, instruct, inform and train. You will need to record the dangers and people you have identified as especially at risk in **step 1** and **step 2**. You should also record what you did about it in **step 3**. A simple plan can help you achieve this.

You will also need to make an emergency plan, tailored to your premises.

It should include the action that you need to take in a fire in your premises or any premises nearby. You will need to give staff, and occasionally others, such as hotel guests or volunteer stewards, instructions. All employees should receive enough information and training about the risks in the premises. Some, such as fire marshals, will need more thorough training.

### **Step 5 – Review**

You should make sure your fire-risk assessment is up to date. You will need to re-examine your fire-risk assessment if you suspect it is no longer valid, such as after a near miss and every time there is a significant change to the level of risk in your premises. This could include:

- if you store more materials which can catch fire easily;
- a new night shift starting; or
- a change in the type or number of people using your premises.

### **Enforcing the order**

Fire authorities will be the main agency responsible for enforcing all fire-safety legislation in non-domestic premises. They will target their resources and inspections at those premises that present the highest risk. All fire authorities will continue to look into complaints about fire safety, carry out investigations after fires where poor fire-safety management is discovered and may carry out targeted inspections.

If you do not meet the order, the fire authority will provide practical advice or, if the risk is serious, a formal notice. Except in the most serious cases, the fire authority will work with you to achieve a satisfactory level of fire safety.

If there is a very serious risk to life, the fire authority can issue a notice preventing the premises being used for certain things (such as sleeping), or preventing people from using all or part of the premises. This power is shared with housing authorities in properties which several households live in.

In all cases you will have a right of appeal, both informally and formally.

An informal appeal, normally to a more experienced fire-safety manager, can sometimes identify a different way of meeting the order.

If this is not successful, you can appeal formally to a magistrate. You can also agree with the enforcing authority to ask for a formal decision from the Secretary of State on a solution if you cannot agree about technical issues.

### **If you change your premises**

In most cases you will be able to change your premises. However, you must remember that you will be responsible for managing the risk you create and you will still have to follow the planning process and building regulations. You will need to look at your fire-risk assessment again and look at how the changes will affect the risk in your premises. You should assess if your risk-management measures are adequate and if you need to take any further action.

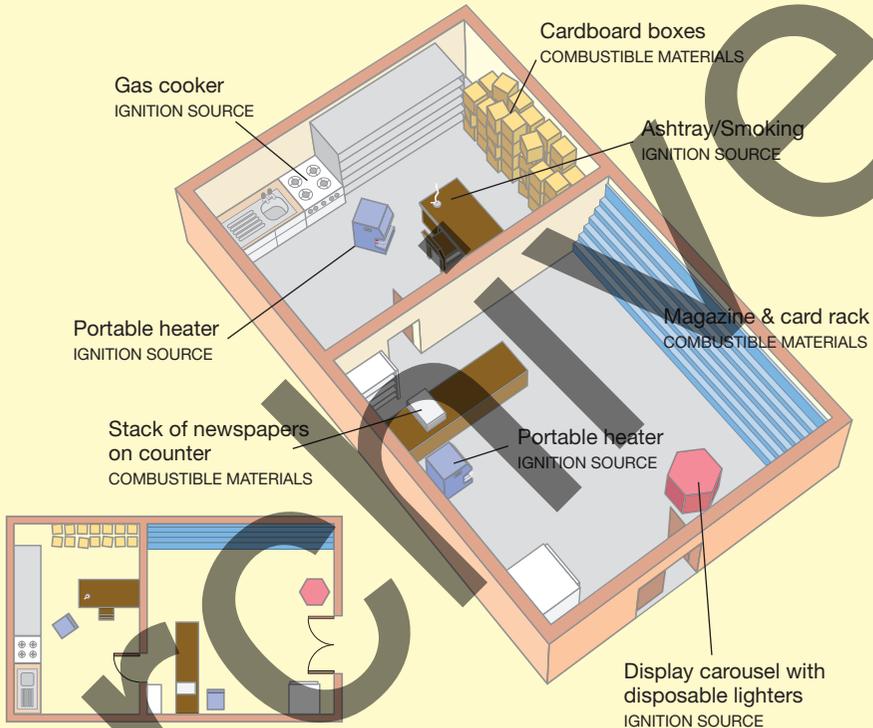
In some higher risk premises, for example, those in which the risk to life can be said to be higher than normal or where particularly complicated fire-safety arrangements are needed, the fire authority will be able to issue an alterations notice. Under the alterations notice, you must tell them about any changes you plan to make to premises if those changes would create a significant increase in the risk.

## An example of how to carry out a simple risk assessment

This example is not the only way of carrying out a fire-risk assessment.

Whatever method you use, it should be able to show that you have kept to the law.

### Before a fire-risk assessment



Make a simple drawing of the premises, drawn roughly to scale, which shows any relevant structural features, such as staircases and how particular areas are used, for example, production, storage or sleeping areas.

The plan should show any dangers (**step 1**) and those people at significant risk (**step 2**). It should also identify where material which could catch fire easily and sources of ignition are close together.

You can use a simple noughts and crosses system – circles for materials and crosses for ignition sources.

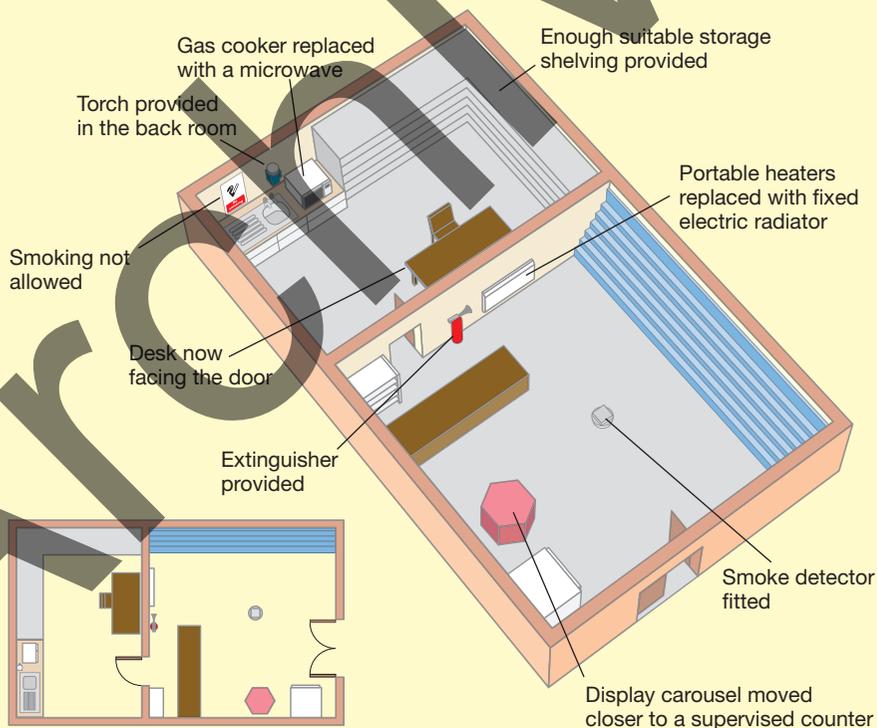
**Step 3** – The action you take should be common sense and, in the main, not expensive. If any requirements prove to be expensive, you may be able to put temporary measures in place until you can put full measures into practice.

This will only be acceptable if there is no serious risk to people.

Forming an emergency plan and assessing training, instruction or recording requirements should take place under **step 4**.

Under **step 5** you should decide on a system of regular reviews.

### After a fire-risk assessment



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## Advice and information

If you need more practical advice or information after you have carried out your fire-risk assessment, your Fire and Rescue Service may be able to help you (see under 'Fire' in the phone book).

You can get guides, suitable for your type of premises, from good bookshops and by downloading them from the internet at

[www.communities.gov.uk/firesafety](http://www.communities.gov.uk/firesafety)

You can get information about managing process risks and highly flammable or explosive materials from your local HSE office or on their website at [www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk). You can get advice on reducing the risk of arson from the Arson Prevention Bureau by phoning 020 7216 7522.

You can get further copies of this booklet and alternative formats from:

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