

Keeping you and your business

Safe and Well



Business Fire Safety



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Is your business safe from fire?

A fire can be devastating for any business but particularly small businesses. Even a small fire may prevent a business from trading for some time, which may have a significant knock-on effect that clients and customers go elsewhere. In many cases, the businesses never truly recover and cease trading within a year of reopening.

This short guide is intended to aid small businesses in preventing fires, reduce unwanted fire alarm activations, keep staff and customers safe and illustrate a simple review of fire safety post fire. We have provided some other fire safety advice, which may be relevant to your business that is often overlooked.

Keeping compliant with fire safety legislation

The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005, places obligations on to the responsible persons for all businesses. Every business must carry out a fire risk assessment of their business. If the business employs 5 or more people or a licence under an enactment is in force on the premises, then the significant findings from that fire risk assessment must be recorded and available on site for inspection by an authorised Fire Safety Inspector.

Completing the following will aid in staying compliant with the fire safety legislation:

- The fire risk assessment is intended to be a live document and as such should be up to date and regularly reviewed. The assessment must be reviewed if any changes are made to the building, processes or use of the building or following an incident.
- Staff fire safety training must be carried out during their induction and then regularly refreshed.
- Carry out regular testing and maintenance of all fire safety equipment or systems. A fire logbook will aid in the management of this testing.
- Compile a company fire safety policy that clearly defines the roles and responsibilities for fire safety across the company.

Preventing false fire alarm activations

False fire alarm activations can cause disruption to your business. If they become so frequent, staff members may become complacent and not react as quickly as they should. The most common causes of false alarms are:

- Contaminants entering the detector head such as dust or fumes from cooking.
- Accidental breakage of manual call points.

Recording all false activations in a fire logbook will help business managers and alarm engineers identify issues or faults in the alarm system. Businesses should check with their alarm engineer the following if false activations are increasing:

- Is there a fault with a particular detector head?
- Is it the wrong type of detector head for that particular location?
- Is it the right type of detector head but badly positioned?



Arson

Simple arson prevention measures

Anti-social behaviour and small acts of arson such as rubbish or wheelie bin fires may be reduced by following these simple steps:

- Always try to keep wheelie bins away from your building. If possible, keep them in a lockable compound or locked shut at night.
- Keep the build up of combustible rubbish to a minimum and any unwanted items such as pallets should be suitably disposed of as soon as possible.
- Secluded, unsecure loading yards should be illuminated with security lighting to try to discourage any antisocial behaviour. The cutting back of trees or bushes to make service yards appear more exposed will aid in this area.



Involve and inform your staff

Staff are a big asset to your business security arrangements. Developing a vigilant workforce who support compliance with your fire safety and business security procedures will help healthy business growth and general operations. When closing for the day make sure staff have procedures for closing down and securing up before leaving the building and site.

Make sure your staff know about fire prevention and its importance to you, having a way of reporting concerns will help improve operations.

Specific fire safety issues inspectors regularly identify

The following topics are some of the common deficiencies that Fire Safety Inspectors regularly find when auditing businesses.

Evacuations

Each business will be responsible for ensuring the safe evacuation of all employees, contractors and customers. Everyone should be able to evacuate to a place of safety without the intervention of the Fire Service. If your premises are accessible to disabled persons, there should be suitable procedures in place to evacuate these people. To achieve this, extra equipment, such as evacuation chairs may be required. Any staff members that could be expected to use such equipment must be suitably trained in its use.



Licenced premises

Any premises licenced by the local authority for the sale of alcohol must have the significant finding from their fire risk assessment written down. The safe occupancy figure for the premises is considered a significant finding and staff members should be made aware of this to prevent any overcrowding. Pubs and restaurants often employ young people under the age of 18, such as kitchen porters or glass collectors. These young people are considered vulnerable due to lack of confidence, experience and life skills and as such, a young person's risk assessment must be carried out prior to their employment. This assessment should highlight

if they will come into contact with any hazardous substances or processes, what fire safety training they have been given and exactly what they are to do on discovering a fire or hearing the fire alarm system.





Open fire and wood burning stoves

Open fire and wood burning stoves are becoming very popular in pubs and restaurants and if properly managed can provide a great feature for the business. The hazards with introducing naked flames into a premises needs to be thoroughly risk assessed. The following points should be considered:

- Chimneys or flues need to be regularly swept by a HETAS approved registered chimney sweep.
- If burning wood, only use properly seasoned timber to prevent excess clogging of the chimney with creosote and tar.
- Do not store logs directly next to the open fire or wood burning stove.
- Only trained staff to place fuel on the fire. Signage should be displayed to discourage customers from putting anything onto the fire.

Compile an open fire procedure which details:

- The time the last log get put on the fire to ensure it is well burnt down before staff leave the building
- How should the fire be left at night, guarded, doors shut etc
- The safe way staff are to deal with the ash
- Remind staff that no rubbish, paper or used tea-lights to be thrown onto the fire

Liquid petroleum gas

Liquid petroleum gas cylinders (LPG) are very commonly used for patio heaters or BBQ's, but they can be very hazardous if not used responsibly. Before allowing this hazardous substance onto your premises, its use should be carefully risk assessed. Only the minimum required amount of cylinders should be stored on site and cylinders should be properly disposed of when no longer required. For more guidance and information on LPG, contact the Health & Safety Executive who enforce the use and storage of hazardous substances.



Seasonal fire safety

At certain times of the year, the layout and stock levels at your business may change greatly. Managers must be aware that excess stock may increase the fire loading within the building. Temporary sales displays must not impede the ability of staff or customers to quickly and safely evacuate. Firefighting equipment must be accessible and all fire exit signage must be clearly visible. If temporary staff are employed to cover busy business periods, they must receive basic fire safety training and have all fire safety procedures explained to them.



Post fire

Following any fire at a business premises, a full review of the incident and fire risk assessment should be carried out. Investigating the cause of the fire and acting on the findings, may prevent another fire occurring. Not only should the cause of the fire be reviewed but also the actions taken by employees, did they all evacuate quickly, was the evacuation procedure followed correctly? The review should establish if any fire safety systems worked effectively and confirm if your business needs to upgrade the fire safety provisions.

If the fire at your premises resulted with the attendance of the Fire & Rescue Service, a Fire Safety Inspector may arrange to carry out an audit of your business. This audit is not only aimed to check compliance but also to provide the best fire safety advice to your business, from a qualified fire safety specialist. The Fire Safety Inspector will be able to pass on any information gathered from the operational fire crews that attended the incident, both what went well and any areas of concern.



The following are two examples of incidents within small businesses, what happened and the outcomes implemented following a review of the incident.

Example # 1

A staff member of a small office building put their lunch in the microwave in a small kitchenette, left it unattended and it caught fire. The microwave was destroyed by fire and smoke affected the kitchenette. It set off the fire alarm by way of a smoke detector in the corridor, due to the kitchen door being wedged open. Staff were slow to evacuate and the visitors book was not collected by a fire marshal. When the fire service attended, nobody could confirm that all persons were accounted for and the building was clear.



Outcomes from a review of the incident:

- All staff were reminded not to leave cooking unattended
- All door wedges be removed from kitchens and suitable hold open devices linked to alarm system bought for fire doors, which require to be held open.
- Fire evacuation procedure reviewed, updated and sent to all staff members.
- A fire drill to be carried out to check new procedure and ensure improvements have been made.
- A new system for logging in and out of the building to be implemented to ensure all persons can be accounted for during an evacuation.
- A report for this incident along with findings and recommendations will be sent to the managers of all other offices within the company to ensure this situation is not replicated across the company.
- Fire risk assessment to be reviewed and updated to reflect any changes.

Example # 2

A retail store with a medium sized shop floor, storeroom and loading area had a fire due to a waste paper bin being placed too close to a portable electric fire. The fire had been left on after the shop closed for the day and a fire in the storeroom area developed. Nobody was in the building at the time of the fire but passers-by heard the fire alarm, smelt smoke and called the fire service.



Outcomes from a review of the incident:

- Staff reminded to switch off all electrical items before they leave work each evening.
- Portable electric heaters should only be used with authorisation of the store manager.
- Only heaters with a built in timer which automatically switch off to be used.
- All electrical heaters were inspected, defective items removed and all of the rest were electrical tested. (PAT)
- A procedure for removing all combustible waste to the secure external bins at the end of each day was implemented.
- A report for this incident along with findings and recommendations will be sent to the managers of all other shops within the company to ensure this situation is not replicated across the company.
- Fire risk assessment reviewed and updated to reflect any changes.

For advice and guidance for commercial fire safety email:
fire.safety@glosfire.gov.uk

Useful contacts

Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters
Tri-Service Building
Waterwells, Quedgeley
GL2 2AX
01452 888777
www.glosfire.gov.uk

British Red Cross
0344 871 11 11

National Grid 24 hour Gas Emergency Service
0800 111 999

ChildLine
0800 11 11

The Silver Line
(Helpline for older people)
0800 4 70 80 90
(24 hours a day, every day)

Severn Trent Water
0800 783 4444 (24hr emergency)

Gloucester Samaritans
116 123 free from any phone

Websites

General advice on all aspects of life in the United Kingdom
www.direct.gov.uk

Health Advice
www.nhs.uk

Highway Code
www.gov.uk/highway-code

Housing Advice
<https://www.gov.uk/browse/housing/council-housing-association>

Citizens Advice Bureau
www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Driving
Driving and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA)
www.gov.co.uk/contact-the-dvla

Gloucestershire Police
www.gloucestershire.police.uk

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