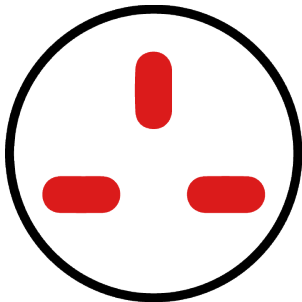


THE FIRE SAFETY GUIDE FOR BUSINESS OWNERS



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1: Introduction

Fire safety is serious business, and not something taken lightly in the eyes of the law. Strict rules and regulations have been implemented by the government to ensure places of work are as safe as possible. Failure to abide by these laws can result in fines, closure of business and even prison sentences. Hundreds of business owners face legal action every year, not for active avoidance, but because they didn't know their responsibilities when it comes to fire safety.

The primary fire safety regulation is the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005, also known as the RRFSO. This detailed law states exactly what action business owners must take to ensure their premises are safe. We've put together this handy guide to decode the RRFSO, and help you stay on the right side of the law.

If you need any further advice on fire safety and your responsibility as a business owner, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

2: Who is Responsible?

We all know that fire safety is a group effort. With careful precautions and a little common sense, thousands of fires could be prevented every year. Responsibility, though, is another story. The RRFSO often refers to the 'responsible person', but just who is this exactly?

According to the RRFSO, the responsible person is:

- (when in relation to a workplace) the employer.
- (If not a workplace) the person in control of the premises.

Those that might be in control of the premises include owners, tradesmen and occupiers.

Responsibilities

The primary responsibilities of the responsible person include:

- Carrying out an annual fire risk assessment.
- Informing staff or their representatives of any risks found.
- Installing and maintaining appropriate fire safety measures
- Developing plans in case of emergency.
- Providing staff with information, instructions and training.

The responsible person is liable for any damages incurred from a fire or emergency following improper fire safety precautions.

What if More Than One Person is Responsible?

If two or more people can be considered responsible, they must co-operate in order to ensure any requirements and regulations are adhered to.

Penalties

Local fire & rescue services and the council have the authority to inspect premises and issue fire safety notices. These notices will often advise of any changes required to bring the business up to date with current UK regulations. Failure to adhere to these notices can result in legal action. Failure to follow fire safety regulations can result in fines, closure of business and even imprisonment!

3: What is Required?

Simply put, the responsible person must take general fire precautions, to protect their employees & customers as far as is reasonably practical. If an reasonably preventable accident occurs, the responsible person will be liable.

A written record of general fire precautions is required if any of the following apply to the business:

- 5 or more people are employed.
- A licence under enactment is in force.
- An alterations notice requiring records to be made is in force.

It is advisable to keep any records safe, with backups readily available.

- Fire Risk Assessments
- Appointment of Competent Persons
- Fire Alarm Tests & Servicing
- Fire Extinguishers & Inspections
- Emergency Lighting Tests & Service
- Emergency Routes & Exits
- Training of Staff

Fire Risk Assessments

An annual fire risk assessment is one of the most crucial parts of fire safety, and a strong foot to start on when implementing a fire prevention strategy.

To comply with UK fire regulations, a written record of all fire risk assessments is required. A fire risk assessment should be carried out once a year. A professional fire prevention company can perform a comprehensive fire risk assessment and provide a full written record. This guarantees that the risk assessment is comprehensive and prove that your establishment is within current fire safety law.

Following an annual risk assessment, it is likely that additional general fire precautions are required.

Appointment of a Competent Person

The responsible person can nominate a competent person to implement any general fire precautions, train staff and ensure any fire safety equipment available is adequate for purpose. This includes performing routine tests. If a competent person has been nominated, you should record it in writing and keep it safe along with any evidence of fire risk assessments or equipment maintenance.

Who is a competent person?

The RRFSO states:

“A person is to be regarded as competent for the purposes of paragraph (3)(b) where he has sufficient training and experience or knowledge and other qualities to enable him properly to implement the measures referred to in that paragraph.”

Provided your staff have been trained in how to carry out the necessary routine inspections, drills and tests, they can be appointed as a competent person in writing.

Fire Alarms

One of the most fundamental tools in fire safety, the fire alarm alerts you to imminent danger. Fire alarm systems are simple in concept, they detect danger and alert people nearby through various means. Legally, you must have a sufficient degree of working fire alarms within your premises.

The RRFSO states:

“the responsible person must ensure that the premises are, to the extent that it is appropriate, equipped with fire-fighting equipment and with fire detectors and alarms.”

If your property doesn't have a sufficient degree of alarm systems, you may face legal action. A professional fire risk assessment is the safest way to ensure that your alarm system is fit for purpose. Failing that, ensuring every room in your premises has at least one smoke detector and alarm is fool-proof. Certain rooms may require additional alarms, for example a carbon monoxide detector in a room that may contain an open fire. Areas that contain dangerous chemicals need more rigorous alarm systems. The responsible person must ensure that a manually operated alarm system, and a power kill switch is available, in any area that contains heavy machinery, dangerous substances or significant health and safety risks,

Every business must have working communications with local authorities. Many alarms can be linked to the local fire brigade, alerting the authorities to an emergency with minimal delay.

Testing and Services

Having sufficient smoke detectors and fire alarms is one thing, but ensuring they are in full working order is another. As such a crucial piece of fire safety, every alarm should be tested at least once a week. This weekly test should be performed by the responsible person, or nominated competent person where applicable.

If any problems arise, such as no sound, a full service may be required. Every action performed in regards to testing fire alarms must be recorded in a Fire Alarm Logbook. It is important to make a note of:

- Any time the fire alarm was activated (including tests)
- Any faults and actions taken as a result
- Any services or maintenance work
- Any alterations made to the alarm system

When making notes in the logbook, remember to include dates, times and remarkable notes.

How to Test Your Alarms

How to test your alarms depends on the what alarm system you have. Stand alone smoke detectors, usually found in single rooms attached to the ceiling, will often have a button that can be used to test the alarms function.

For more complex alarm systems, you should test the alarms remotely via a manual call point. Some systems may need to be isolated during the test, for example, communication to the local fire brigade. Once initiated, make sure all alarms, bells and sounders

produce adequate sound. Ensure any doors with electromagnetic security locks are released, and any illuminated signs are operational.

If you are unsure of how to test your alarms, get in touch with the alarm manufacturer or the company who installed your alarms.

Routine Maintenance

Regardless of results during fire alarm tests, you should formally service your fire alarms once every six months. This service should be done by a professional, fire alarm maintenance company to ensure current British Standards are adhered to.

Failure to provide evidence of six monthly services can result in a fire safety notice being issued, and even legal action.

Fire Extinguishers

When it comes to fire fighting, the most crucial tool at any persons disposal is the fire extinguisher. There are many types of fire extinguisher available, each tailored to a specific type of fire. It is imperative that you have the correct fire extinguishers available near any possible sources of ignition.

In the eyes of the law, the responsible person must ensure that the premises is equipped with sufficient fire extinguishers. This can be done with a simple fire risk assessment performed by a fire safety professional. Fire extinguishers must also be easy to access, simple to use and signposted.

To decide on the best fire extinguisher to use, one must look at the fuel that feeds the fire. The table below shows various sources of fuel, and the ideal extinguisher to combat the flames.

<u>Type of Fire Extinguisher</u>	<u>Type of Fire</u>
Water	Solid fuel
Foam	Solid fuel and flammable liquid
Dry Powder	Solid fuel, flammable liquid and electrical fires
CO2	Electrical fires
Wet Chemical	Solid fuel and cooking oil fires

It is important that you ensure your premises has the appropriate fire extinguishers installed in an easy to access location. A professional fire safety engineer can identify significant areas of risk and install wall brackets on which to mount fire extinguishers. Any fire safety point must be well indicated by signs and lighting to increase visibility.

Testing & Services

The responsible person must ensure that any fire extinguishers are regularly serviced and well maintained. Fire extinguishers should be inspected by a competent person once a month, and serviced by a professional fire safety engineer at least once a year.

How to Inspect Your Fire Extinguishers

There are two kinds of fire extinguisher that require servicing; stored pressure fire extinguishers, and cartridge operated extinguishers. Stored pressure extinguishers hold the extinguishing agent in the same cylinder as the pressurising gas. Cartridge operated extinguishers hold the extinguishing agent in a separate cylinder to the pressurising gas.

Perform the following checks once a month to ensure reliability:

- Ensure the safety pin and tamper clip are in place.
- Check the extinguisher service label. If the extinguisher is due for a service, go no further and book a full service with a professional fire protection company.
- Examine the extinguisher for corrosion or damage. Check the manufacturer's label is clear and easy to read.
- Ensure the pressure gauge indicator is within the 'green zone'.
- Check wall mounting for insecurities or damage.

Emergency Routes & Exits

In the event of an emergency, your customers and employees may need to evacuate the premises as quickly and as safely as possible. A short, well signposted and illuminated exit route will ensure your customers are transported to safety, as efficiently as possible.

There are numerous requirements to ensure that emergency exits are as efficient as possible. As a business owner, you must ensure that all emergency routes are free from obstructions. Any equipment or goods must be properly stored so as to not hinder or slow the escape of customers and employees in the event of an emergency.

Your emergency exits must lead to safety, as directly as possible. It's no use having a convoluted escape route. You're more likely to run into problems than away from them.

The premises must have sufficient escape routes. Your escape routes should accommodate for how many people are within the premises and the dimensions of the building itself.

Signs & Lighting

All emergency exits must be signposted. Signs must be clearly visible and free from any damage. A fire risk assessment can identify the most effective escape route, as well as where any necessary signs should be placed.

During emergency situations like a fire or a flood, mains lights can be affected. It is important that your escape routes are clearly visible and easy to navigate. For this, emergency lighting is crucial. The RRF50 (14:2:H) states: “Emergency routes and exits requiring illumination must be provided with emergency lighting of adequate intensity in the case of failure of their normal lighting.” It is essential to test your emergency lighting at least once a month to ensure it is operating correctly. A full annual service by reputable fire prevention company is always advisable.

Fire Doors

Fire doors are crucial to an effective emergency exit. Strong enough to withstand high temperatures and thick enough to slow a fire down, the fire door is invaluable when it comes to escape. A fire door can buy your customers and employees the vital minutes necessary to make it to safety.

Fire doors must be kept closed, and clear from obstruction at all times. An open fire door instantly loses all effectiveness. Over time, hinges, locks and latches may become worn and less effective. Maintenance may be required, but simply checking the fire door closes with little trouble is sufficient.

Doors must open in the direction of escape. This is especially important of doors that exit the building. Many fire exit doors have panic bars attached. Panic bars immediately open the door when pushed on, which reduces the chance of people being crushed by others in an emergency situation. Emergency doors and exits must not be locked or fastened so that they cannot be opened quickly and easily. Sliding and revolving doors are also unsuitable as fire exit doors.

Training of staff

As the responsible person, it is your duty to ensure that all persons employed within your business are fully capable to deal with an emergency situation. Your staff are in a position of responsibility and must be able to ensure any customers or visitors are escorted safely off the premises. Training should be provided at the beginning of a staff member's employment, and on the introduction of new risks and hazards to that staff member.

All staff should be shown how to alert the business to a fire through the use of any manual alarm system or fire suppression system. Where necessary, staff should also be trained in handling fire extinguishers, evacuating the premises and any other precautions to protect their well-being.

As a business owner you must ensure that all staff are sufficiently trained to handle and operate any goods or machinery that their job may require. If an accident occurs at the place of business due to insufficient training, the responsible person can be held responsible and incur a fine.

A full risk assessment will provide information on what specific training is required for any individual staff member.

Electrical Safety

Faulty electrical equipment and installations are one of the main reasons fire starts. It is extremely important that you monitor the condition of your electrical equipment and installations and keep on top of all repairs. All portable items should be PAT tested on a regular basis, normally between 3 months to 3 years depending on the environment and age of your equipment. Most companies and organisations choose to have PAT testing carried out every year as this will give you the best cost to risk ratio for most common businesses.

Your electrical installation should also be tested by a qualified electrician every 3 to 5 years.

4: Your Checklist

Below you will find a breakdown of what is expected as a business owner regarding fire safety, you must record all the below inspections in your fire log book and have the fire log book available for the local enforcement offices to inspect.

Task	Tick
Instructed a competent company/person to carry out a fire risk assessment?	
Appointed a competent person/s?	
Instructed a qualified company/person to carry out 6 months service of your fire alarm system?	
Your appointed competent person/s carry out weekly testing of your fire alarm system?	
Instructed a qualified company/person to carry out yearly servicing of your fire extinguishers?	
Your appointed competent person/s carry out monthly inspections of your fire extinguishers?	
Your appointed competent person/s carry out monthly inspections of your fire extinguishers?	
Your appointed competent person/s carry out daily inspections of your emergency routes and exits?	
Instructed a qualified company/person to carry out regular testing of your portable appliances (PAT testing)?	
Instructed a qualified company/person to carry out regular testing of your fixed electrical insulation (Fixed wire testing)?	