



Handy Fire Risk Assessment Guide

The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (RRO) was a game-changing piece of legislation in the fire prevention world and many UK businesses remain confused by it.

On October 1st 2006, the Regularly Reform (fire safety) Order 2005 came in to force; it represented a major change in how the protection of buildings, their occupants and the environment around them was dealt with.

The requirement for a dedicated 'responsible person' or team to ensure risk assessments of every work premises took place regularly was a big step forward.

With the RRO in force 'life safety' equipment must be installed, fully maintained and fit for purpose and 'responsible persons' will be held to account if it is not. The RRO has been one of the most important pieces of legislation in recent times.

Responsible Persons

The RRO provides details of the requirements for a 'Responsible Person'. The 'Responsible Person' is generally a Chief Executives, MD, Director, or Senior Manager who is responsible for a business premises or a group of premises. This Responsible Person has a duty to comply with the RRO, to keep staff, customers, visitors, and contractors safe.

Does being a Responsible Person require specialist knowledge?

Not necessarily.

The 'Responsible Person' will require a good level of understanding about the causes of fire, how to prevent fire and what to do in the event of a fire.

How will the Responsible Person know how to comply with the RRO?

The process starts with carrying out a Fire Risk Assessment (FRA) as outlined in Article 9 of the RRO.

The complexity of any Fire Risk Assessment is determined by the type of building and processes completed within it. Most businesses do not have staff members who hold the level of experience and knowledge necessary to carry out a 'suitable and sufficient' risk assessment and will therefore employ outside consultants such as FireCare & Security Ltd.

In simple terms what is a Fire Risk Assessment?

Just as an MOT for your car is a regular assessment to establish its safety, an FRA assesses the safety of your business premises. We use all of the fire regulations to assess a building, its staff and procedures onsite. As with an MOT a FRA is a legal requirement and any weaknesses highlighted in the report produced must be addressed.

Having an accident whilst driving a car without an up-to-date MOT is likely to result in prosecution and invalid insurance; the same is true of having a business premises without a sufficient FRA in place; the 'Responsible Person' is left vulnerable to prosecution if a routine visit from the Fire Service or worse still an actual fire results in the discovery of a missing or insufficient FRA.

Driving a car after it has failed its MOT would be dangerous, illegal, potentially costly and would put lives at risk; increase all costs exponentially and this is the risk of ignoring compliance issues highlighted by your risk assessment.

I have a small business and only employ two people. Does the RRO affect me?

Yes – you will need to carry out a FRA.

However, an FRA only needs to be documented if you employ 5 or more members of staff. Even if you have less than 5 staff members, you would still need to be able to prove your understanding of the RRO if asked to by the Fire Service.

What are the consequences to the 'Responsible Person' of failing to comply with the RRO?

Any failure that leads to loss of life, personal injury or damage to property could lead to prosecution of the Responsible Person. Those convicted will experience the full weight of the law – Minor penalties include fines of up to £5,000, with major penalties of unlimited fines or up to two years in prison.

There is a growing portfolio of cases that demonstrates the seriousness of this issue. Take, for instance, the Nottinghamshire businessman who was found guilty of a failure to carry out a suitable and sufficient risk assessment.

His crimes included failure to comply with an enforcement order, failure to ensure an effective means of escape from the premises, failure to ensure that exit routes were clear at all times, failure to provide adequate emergency lighting on emergency routes and exits, and failure to ensure that the non-automatic fire-fighting equipment provided was easily accessible, simple to use and indicated by signs.

He was sentenced to 26 weeks imprisonment suspended for two years, ordered to do 180 hours unpaid work and had to pay £4,000 in costs.

I've just changed the use of my building. Do I need to carry out another risk assessment?

Yes. The 'Responsible Person' or premises management team is required to conduct a risk assessment as soon as any changes, which may have an effect on the risk of fire, are made in the workplace.

Besides a Fire Risk Assessment review when changes occur, the assessment should be **reviewed and updated on an annual basis**.

What safety equipment do I need for my business?

Fire Extinguishers

All premises must have extinguishers fitted; Article 13 of the RRO states that this is a legal requirement.

Some business owners still believe that when a fire occurs they should evacuate and not attempt to fight the fire themselves, they therefore wonder at the point of installing fire fighting equipment such as extinguishers. In the later section on fire safety training I explain why it is necessary to be able to tackle a fire, but whether or not you feel it important to provide extinguishers, the legislation is very clear that they **MUST** be provided.



How do I know which extinguishers I need?

The Fire Industry works within a code of practice provided by the British Standards Institute, the National Standards body for the UK. All fire safety companies use these same standards to guide them and the businesses they advise. These standards carefully specify the types, locations and volume of extinguisher each situation requires. The code that governs extinguishers is BS 5306.

Unfortunately, despite British Standards FireCare still finds that at 90% of the sites we visit, servicing companies are not servicing to current standards. It is not enough to have equipment regularly serviced; it must also be serviced by a competent company, so it is crucial that you ensure you choose carefully.

Do we need to perform any checks ourselves?

Yes; site staff should be trained by their servicing company to carry out user checks on a monthly basis.

The RRO states that the 'Responsible Person' or premises management team must ensure that "the premises and any facilities, equipment and devices provided in respect of the premises are subject to a suitable system of maintenance and are maintained in an efficient state, in efficient working order and in good repair".

A professional fire safety equipment servicing company should be employed to carry out all annual servicing of your equipment.

Problems we encounter:

There are a number of problems we commonly find when taking over new sites:

Customer failures: No extinguishers
Wrong type of extinguishers
Extinguishers fitted in the wrong locations
Extinguishers not serviced annually by a fire servicing company
(extinguishers require annual servicing by a professional company who will then issue a suitable certificate of conformity.)

Servicing Company failures: Extinguishers not fitted at the correct height
Too many extinguishers (over supply – charging customers for unnecessary products)
Wrong type of extinguishers installed
Extinguishers fitted in wrong locations
Incorrectly serviced

Remember – we can provide a free no obligation review of your current equipment to ensure you are getting the best from your provider.

Emergency Lights

Emergency lights are light fittings that have a battery behind them; the battery is being continually charged so that when there is a break to the electrical supply, particularly in an emergency such as a fire, the lights will come on to illuminate escape routes.



Do I need emergency lights?

Article 14 of the RRO states that emergency routes and exits must be provided with emergency lighting of adequate intensity to illuminate them in the case of failure of the normal lighting. Unless your building is occupied only during daylight hours (9am – 3.30pm allowing for the darkness of winter months), you will require emergency lighting. The function of Emergency lighting is to indicate a clear means of escape and to provide illumination along escape routes to allow safe passage to exits.

What do they look like?

Most are either a fitting on the ceiling that we call a bulkhead, sometimes they are linked to a normal light fitting and can be less obvious. Generally there is a 'charging indicator' most likely a green or red diode which gives you some indication of where they are in a building.



On occasion they are linked to signs such as an exit signs, this type of emergency light combines the illumination of escape routes with the provision of information.

Do I need to service them?

A professional fire safety company or qualified electrician should be employed to service all emergency lights at least annually; whoever services them must provide a suitable certificate to confirm that the lights confirm to current British Standards.

Emergency lights should also be tested monthly, usually by someone in-house; if you employ a fire safety company to service annually, they should also train your staff to properly carry out all monthly lighting tests.

Where do emergency lights need to be fitted?

BS 5266 (the section of the British standards relating to emergency lighting) tells us the type and location of lights needed and also details the servicing requirements. However, for information relating specifically to your building a full fire risk assessment is necessary. The FRA will give details of the volume, type and placement of lights for your premises.

A rough guide is as follows:

Outside exit doors

Along all escape routes

Covering any open areas along escape routes

Covering all floor space of any open area larger than 60sqm

3 hour battery backup required for licensed premises and entertainment venues (cinema's bowling alleys etc) or where occupants sleep on site or where early reoccupation is required.

High task areas must have emergency lights e.g. doctors and dentist surgeries, areas with large machines that need to be turned off.

Any trip hazard on an escape route must be illuminated by an emergency light; stairs, steps etc.

Outside Lifts

Motor generator, control and plant rooms

WCs exceeding 8sqm

WCs with no natural lights

Any change of direction on an escape route.

Reception areas of a main building, especially when a fire panel is fitted

Fire Alarms

Article 13 of the RRO which types of buildings require fire alarms; not all business premises will need an alarm on site; if, for instance, all areas can be seen from every vantage point, as with small offices and shops an alarm is unlikely to be necessary. As with all other fire safety requirements the Fire Risk Assessment will provide specific guidance.



Generally if a building has several levels, at risk persons on site, multiple rooms or areas or people performing dangerous activities, an alarm system will be required.

What type of alarm do I need?

There are many and varied alarm systems to choose from on the market; wired or wireless systems, addressable or non-addressable, beam detectors, cameras etc. with such complexity of choice it is important to discuss the options with a competent professional.

Your Fire Risk Assessment in conjunction with BS 5839 of the British Standards will also explain the 'level' of system needed for your building.

It is crucial for safety and compliance that the correct level of alarm is installed:

L	detection to primarily protect Human Life
L1	Detection throughout all area
L2	Detection installed in defined areas additional to L3
L3	Detectors installed on escape routes and rooms opening onto those routes
L4	Detectors installed in escape routes comprising circulation areas and spaces such as corridors and stairways
L5	A non-prescriptive system in which the protected area is designed to satisfy a specific fire risk objective (other than that of L1 – L4)
M	System designed to be operated manually (no detectors only call points)

What is a fire panel?

The fire panel is the control panel for an alarm system.

From the fire panel, the alarm system can be manipulated; for example, when a specific area of the system needs to be shut down to allow work to take place.

In very simple terms, detectors throughout a building are wired to the fire panel; these detectors send their signals to the panel which in turn sends a signal to the bells and beacons triggering the alarm.

Fire panels are programmed by fire safety engineers to control alarm systems in specific ways.

Do I need to service my alarm?

British standards specify that alarm systems need to be serviced not less than every six months.

A professional fire safety servicing company should be employed to perform this servicing regularly and to provide a suitable certificate to confirm that the system conforms to British standards.

Weekly tests are also necessary; the professional fire safety servicing company you employ will also train you and your staff to carry out these weekly tests properly.

These checks will test detectors, beams, panel, batteries, sounders and bells.

Fire Training

Basic Fire Safety Training

The Responsible Person must provide training to all staff as detailed in the RRO. Article 21 states that the responsible person must ensure that employees are provided with adequate safety training-

- (a) at the time when they are first employed and then periodically.



Basic Fire Safety Training should include information about all fire safety devices onsite i.e. extinguishers, call points, escape routes and assembly points and their respective locations.

Basic training should also include company specific information i.e. details of hazardous materials or dangerous work activities and any issues outlined in the Fire Risk Assessment.

Crucial to the training of course will be what action needs to be taken in the case of a fire.

Basic training should be repeated annually.

Fire Warden / Fire Marshall Training

Earlier in this document I promised to clarify the situation with regard to business policies which prioritise total staff evacuation over attempts to safely deal with a fire.

It is still the view of some companies that no action to fight a fire on site should be ever taken by staff, however, since the RRO came in to force, evacuating your business premises in the event of a fire without taking safe, appropriate measures to tackle the fire is illegal and contravenes the RRO; businesses can be and have been prosecuted for this contravention and have found their insurance invalidated at point of claim.

Why is Fire Safety training SO important for our staff?

All businesses are required to have extinguishers fitted in order to protect both lives and property; it makes sense therefore that businesses are also expected to train staff in the correct use of equipment provided.

Most of us have set off a smoke detector at home from time to time; perhaps with burnt toast or something similar. Although the alarm is sounding, the burnt toast is not, at this point, a fire; detectors pick up the earliest signs of a fire, this is usually at a stage before a full fire has developed. Most fires do not, thankfully, erupt into huge fire balls immediately; instead they start small and take time to develop.

In 9 out of 10 cases, in studies conducted by the Fire Service, it was found that trained staff would easily and safely put out a fire before it ever required Fire Service involvement.

It is a requirement of the legislation to protect property and reduce the impacts of fire on the environment and neighbouring properties as well as to protect lives.

Since 2005, the role of the Fire Service has changed in relation to commercial premises; it is now the responsibility of the 'Responsible Person' to evacuate all staff, customers and visitors from a building; the Fire Service attends site only to fight a fire.

Only a third of small to medium business will still be in existence after a serious fire. Most company owners will invest time, money, resources and emotion into building a business; a fire can destroy this.

Production or provision of services to customers will likely stop, and yet staff will still need to be paid during the lengthily claims process, potentially devastating cash flow. Company records, history and other valuable information are often permanently lost in the fire making day to day processes impossible.

The thing that most often sounds the death knell of a fire stricken company however is quite simply the loss of its customers who often fail to return from their interim suppliers.

Fire Warden training in premises should be seen as a tool to assist the 'Responsible Persons' in their incredibly important role. Trained staff should be the eyes and ears on site, daily helping them to protect the business from the risk of fire.

What does the legislation say?

Articles 12 and 15 detail what is required of the Responsible Person; they must establish and, where necessary, give effect to appropriate procedures to be followed in the event of serious and imminent danger to relevant persons, these procedures will include safety drills. They must nominate a sufficient number of competent persons to implement these procedures in so far as they relate to the evacuation of relevant persons from the premises.

This training must be suitable and sufficient and must be to a level which allows the employee to safeguard himself and other relevant persons on the premises.

The responsible person has to establish procedures that will keep people safe from a fire on the premises. In every case, the responsible person has to bring these procedures to bear if it becomes necessary at any time i.e. if the premises experiences a fire the procedures must be implemented. Therefore the procedures must be practical and specific to the circumstances of each case and as such are likely to vary from premises to premises and with the number of trained staff members present, the level of training they have been given and the nature of the building's occupancy.

The Responsible Person must take measures for fire-fighting in the premises, adapted to the nature of the activities carried out there and nominate competent persons to implement those measures and ensure that the number of such persons, their training and the equipment available to them is adequate, taking into account the size of, and the specific hazards involved in, the premises concerned

This training must be suitable and sufficient and must be to a level which allows the employee to safeguard himself and other relevant persons on the premises

An employee's competence will decline if skills are not used regularly (e.g. in emergency procedures, operating a particular item of equipment or carrying out a task). Training therefore needs to be refreshed periodically to ensure continued competence

In simple Terms

The training of staff in basic fire safety and the roles of Fire Warden/Marshall is deemed absolutely essential for every business sites in England and at FireCare & Security we can assist you with this training.

We can help!

Our customers tell us that having one company provide all fire safety and security services for them streamlines the management of the services and makes their lives easier.

We know that providing multiple services for customers, all under one roof, works best as it allows us to reduce costs and minimises disruption to their businesses.

FireCare can help you navigate the legislative minefield by keeping things simple and honest.

With competitive pricing, great customer care and the sort of peace of mind that many of our competitors still fail to provide.

It is staggering but true that at over 90% of the sites we visit companies are not compliant with legislation most often because their providers are quite simply failing them.

We are proud to offer a completely free and without obligation survey of your building followed by a quotation allowing you to compare the services we offer with those you have in place.

To request a survey simply email us at info@firecareandsecurity.co.uk

or call us on **02380 269833**