

#### Fire Safety Matters

A quick glance at the latest fire safety statistics illustrates how important fire safety in the workplace remains. In 2008:

- The United Kingdom Fire and Rescue Services attended 727,000 fire and false alarm incidents
- There were 327,000 reported fires within the UK, 27,000 of which were in workplaces and areas where people gather.
- There were 453 fire deaths within the UK, including 342 fire deaths in England.

#### Happy Birthday RRFSO

The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order (RRFSO) was implemented three years ago this month, so we thought we would mark the occasion with a brief look at fire safety and the impact the RRFSO has had upon workplaces.

#### Are you Responsible?

The RRFSO identifies a key role with specific fire-safety responsibilities within organisations – The “**Responsible Person**” (RP)

The RP is anyone who has a degree of control over premises or systems, including employers, occupiers, landlords, managing agents, or anyone else who has some control over premises.

If no-one has been identified as the RP within an organization then, by default, the most senior person with operation responsibility for the premises will be considered responsible.

#### What must the RP do?

The main requirement is to carry out a fire risk assessment and act on the findings.

There is unfortunately still a degree of misunderstanding about what fully constitutes a “suitable & sufficient” fire risk assessment but, as a minimum, it should consider:

- Are sources of fuel and ignition controlled?
- Is there adequate means for detecting fire and giving warning?
- Is there adequate means of escape in case of fire from all parts of the premises?
- Has adequate and appropriate fire-fighting equipment been provided, and is it suitably located?
- Is there an adequate testing and maintenance regime in place for fire precautions within the premises?
- Have employees been adequately trained in fire safety procedures within the premises and in the use of fire-fighting equipment?

**“A fire risk assessment will help you identify risks that can be reduced and to decide the nature of the general fire precautions you need to take to protect people against the fire risks that remain.**

**If you employ five or more people you must record your risk assessment and any significant findings”**

## Recent Prosecutions

**In addition to the obvious benefits of assessing the fire risks, a number of recent prosecutions have further illustrated the importance of employers managing fire safety within their organization:**

A Director of a company responsible for a multi-occupation property in London was jailed for 4 months, and his company was fined £21,000 plus £8,000 costs for a series of breaches of the RRFSO including:

- No fire risk assessment
- Malfunctioning fire alarm
- Inadequate firefighting equipment
- Blocked means of escape
- Inadequate records

A major international petroleum Company was fined £300,000 and ordered to pay £45,000 in costs convicted after pleading guilty to serious breaches of the RRFSO at its London offices.

The management of a north London restaurant received fines, costs and a victim surcharge totalling £16,766.03. following breaches of the RFSO that were discovered as a result of a fire at the premises

The management had no effective emergency plan in place which resulted in staff not knowing what to do. When the fire service arrived, staff were “running around in confusion” and refused to evacuate even when ordered to do so by Fire Service personnel.

## This Month's Essential Fire Safety Tips:

- 1. Assess the Risks.** An alarming number of “Responsible Persons” have still not carried out a suitable Fire Risk Assessment, although the RRFSO has now been in place for over 3 years!
- 2. Review your Fire Assessment.** You should review your assessment annually, or if there are significant changes in circumstances - such as new equipment processes or building features. This does not normally mean re-writing your assessment – just checking that it remains valid and ensuring that your precautions are still appropriate.
- 3. If you Fail to Plan, your Plan will Fail.** Have you developed a fire evacuation plan that summarises the actions to be taken in the event of a fire? Have you communicated your evacuation procedures to all your employees, visitors and contractors? In small businesses with basic premises, your plan will normally be very basic. In more complex premises, a more detailed plan may be necessary.
- 4. Avoid Nasty Shocks.** Electrical faults are one of the main causes of fires in the UK. Check that all your fixed electrical installations and portable electrical equipment have been periodically tested and inspected. Avoid multiple-outlet adaptors, which can overheat if overloaded.
- 5. Control your Contractors.** Don't let contractors undo all your hard work. Use a Hot Work Permit system for all contractors working on your premises. If they are introducing potential ignition sources onto your premises – you want to be sure that they are adequately controlled.
- 6. Practice makes Perfect.** Organise fire drills at your premises at least annually, preferably 6 monthly. For some higher risk premises drills might even be necessary on a quarterly basis. Rehearsing your evacuation procedures will not only identify any shortfalls in your evacuation plan, it will ensure that your staff know what to do in the event of a fire, and reduce delays and confusion.
- 7. Prevention is Better than a Cure.** Keep a close eye on the amounts of potential fuel sources at your workplace. Make sure that combustible waste is removed regularly and any flammable materials are stored correctly.
- 8. Make the Most of Marshals.** Many workplaces have Fire Marshals or Fire Wardens but often their role is mainly focused upon responding to fires. Why not use your Fire Marshals and wardens to monitor fire safety pro-actively and help avoid costly and potentially life-threatening fires before they start?
- 9. Make it personal.** If you have people on your premises who may not be able to easily evacuate the premises without assistance, you may need to develop a Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan (PEEP) for them, and discuss the arrangements for their safe evacuation.
- 10. If in Doubt, ask.** Essential Safety will be more than happy to advise and support you with the fire precautions at your premises. Just contact us to discuss your concerns, and we will be delighted to help.