

Overview

Everyone has heard the term ‘Risk Assessment’, in fact you’ve probably heard it quite a lot. So is the world going Health and Safety mad, or is this an essential part of modern living?

In this document we explain:

-  **What a Risk Assessment is**
-  **The importance of a Risk Assessment**
-  **Who should carry out a Risk Assessment**
-  **What to look for when doing your Risk Assessment**
- and,
-  **What the consequences are if you do not do it properly.**

This document will be useful for end users, in particular the ‘Responsible Person’ for Fire Safety.

Despite the stories you hear, the HSE is about saving lives, not stopping people living.

Background

A formal risk assessment is a fundamental requirement for any business. Put simply, if you don't know, or appreciate where the risks are, you are putting yourself, your employees, your customers and your organisation in danger.

There are a number of important pieces of legislation relating to this area, including The Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992, which contain a consistent set of requirements. Employers also have a general duty under the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 to ensure the health, safety and welfare of their employees at work.

Furthermore, in order to comply with the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, it is a legal requirement for every employer and self-employed person to carry out a systematic examination of their work activities and identify the health and safety risks arising from them.

When it comes to the dangers associated specifically with fire, the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (RRFSO) makes it mandatory for a dedicated 'responsible person' to ensure that premises are risk assessed and that any installed life safety equipment is fully maintained and fit for purpose.

The provisional figure for the number of workers fatally injured in 2013/14 is 133. The finalised figure for 2012/13 is 150 worker fatalities

Who Can Carry Out a Fire Risk Assessment

A 'responsible person', as defined by the RRFSSO, should understand the principles of fire safety, the causes of fire and the means for prevention. They must also have knowledge of the design of fire protection measures and an understanding of the behaviour of people in a fire situation.

However, if the responsible person does not have the knowledge to carry out a fire risk assessment on their own, it will be necessary to call on an outside fire risk assessor – someone who is suitably experienced and has a qualification such as the BRE BTEC Professional Diploma in Fire Risk Assessment.

If you're concerned about any aspect of a fire risk assessment, the Health & Safety Executive (HSE) will be able to advise.



“...in 2010-11,
workplace injury
(including fatalities)
cost an estimated
£5.4 billion

What Does a Risk Assessment Involve?

There are no hard and fast rules as to how fire risk assessments should be carried out, as every organisation is unique and may require a slightly different approach. However, it's important that they are carried out systematically and all of the foreseeable risks considered.

Important Considerations when assessing your building (this is not a definitive list!):

01

Identify the fire hazards and how employees could be at risk. Commonly missed hazards include damaged power cables, mis-used extension cables, improper storage, blocked sprinkler heads, no emergency plan, open fire doors and unsafe space heaters.

02

As well as employees, also consider others who could be affected including contractors, temporary workers, volunteers and the general public. You will also need to consider vulnerable people such as the elderly, the infirmed and people with disabilities.

03

How is the room being used? Has it changed? If so you may need an external Fire Installation Company to come in and reassess the spacing and siting of the fire detectors.

04

You'll need to consider emergency routes and exits; these should not be blocked in any way. Routes should be appropriately lit by emergency lighting and there should be clear signage.

05

Fire detection and warning systems should have an ongoing maintenance plan to ensure they are operating correctly. Firefighting equipment such as extinguishers should be checked annually by a competent person.

Reasonably Practicable

The concept of ‘reasonably practicable’ is at the heart of the UK’s health and safety system. It is a legal term that means employers must balance the cost of steps that they could take to reduce a risk against the degree of risk presented.

It’s all about taking appropriate measures that realistically reflect the level of risk. For example, to spend £1m to prevent two members of staff suffering from bruised knees is grossly disproportionate. However, spending the same amount on preventing an explosion that could kill or maim 150 people would be reasonable.

Most workers think that their workplace has



a good health and safety environment

Hazard or Risk

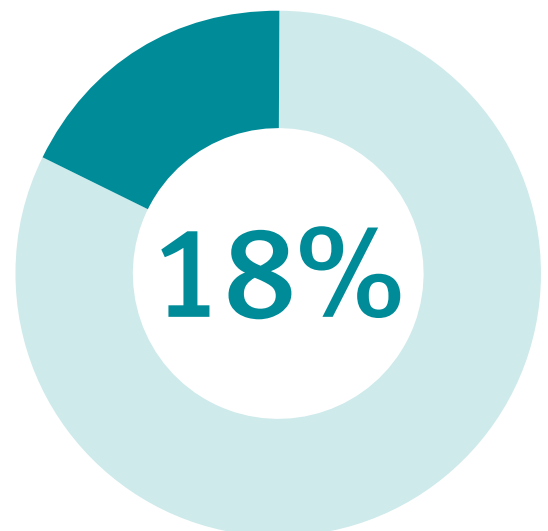
You may be thinking, ‘whats the difference?’



Broadly speaking, a hazard is anything with the potential to cause harm – electricity, hazardous substances and noise are good examples.



On the other hand, risk is measured by the likelihood that damage, loss or injury will be caused by a hazard and how severe the outcome may be.



of workers think their job risks their health or safety

I've Just Completed a Fire Risk Assessment, What Next?

You must now evaluate the risks and decide on precautions. Once evaluated, it is necessary to formally record your findings and remove or reduce the risks identified.

If the building is already in use then there should already be an emergency plan in place, however if it is a new building then you may need to prepare one and provide training information to employees and other people on the premises.

It is also important to remember to review and update the fire risk assessment regularly – at least annually – or as soon as changes are made in the workplace which have an effect on the fire risk or people at risk.



There were 275 Fire Fatalities in England in 2013-14)

Consequences

Risk Assessments are an essential part of modern day living, keeping the people around you alive and safe. If a Risk Assessment is done poorly, the consequences could be severe.

Death is the worst-case scenario.

In 2007 at the Penhallow Hotel in Newquay a blaze killed three people and was described as the most deadly hotel fire in the UK for nearly 40 years. The owners were fined £80,000 and ordered to pay £62,000 costs for failing to meet fire safety standards and not maintaining the building's fire detection system.

The HSE can also carry out spot checks to see whether a premises has carried out a risk assessment and its doing all it can to minimise danger to occupants. Those convicted of not doing so will experience the full weight of the law – minor penalties include a fine of up to £5,000 for breaching Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974, while major penalties can mean unlimited fines and up to two years in prison.

In addition, under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005, Fire Safety Enforcement Officers now have the right to enter any work place at any reasonable hour, without giving notice to inspect a premises. If a breach is found, then the severity of the action will be decided by the officer. Sometimes informal advice may be given or an Enforcement Notice may be issued, but a severe breach could lead to prosecution.



13503 notices were issued by HSE and local authorities. HSE prosecuted 597 cases, with at least one conviction achieved in 568 cases (95%)

Dont pay the price, know your stuff!

Ensure you have as many relevant Documents as possible to help you understand fire safety. Click on the logo for more information.



You may also find some useful information about Emergency Lighting on the ICEL website.



Useful Fire Safety information can be found on the Fire Safe Website.



Hochiki have a number of free fire safety guides and documents that can be downloaded from the website and our brochure app. Download now by clicking the relevant icon.



Hochiki Europe are also an approved supplier of CPD seminars.



The HSE have some guidance for Risk Assessments on their website

For all of your Fire Detection and Emergency Lighting needs contact

