

THE Burning Issue™

KEEPING YOU INFORMED ABOUT FIRE SAFETY LEGISLATION

Information and Training - Responsibilities of the Responsible Person

In the October issue of Burning Issue, we stressed the importance of fire safety management. One vital element to which we referred was provision of information and training. A factor in many fire tragedies is lack of staff training. Experience has shown that such tragedies can occur in a building in which physical fire precautions are adequate.

In England and Wales, the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order imposes numerous requirements on the Responsible Person in respect of provision of information and training. (Identical requirements apply in Scotland and will soon apply in Northern Ireland.) To the extent appropriate, these requirements are also imposed on any other person having control of the premises (e.g. landlords or managing agents).

The "general fire precautions", which are the main thrust of the Order, include "measures relating to the instruction and training of employees". The most fundamental requirement is proper instruction and training of employees on induction. This is a requirement of Article 21, which also requires that training is given if employees are exposed to new or increased risks (e.g. as a result of changes to responsibilities, equipment, technologies or systems of work).

The training must address the precautions necessary for the protection of the employee and other relevant persons, be adapted to any new or changed risk, be provided in a manner appropriate to the risk identified by the risk assessment and must take place during working hours. The training must also be repeated periodically where appropriate - in practice, regular "refresher" training will always be appropriate; history shows that employees do not remember fire procedures and fire precautions years after induction.

Moreover, it is not sufficient merely to give a short token outline of the fire procedures. Article 19 of the Order requires that the Responsible Person provide his employees with comprehensible and relevant information on risks and necessary general fire precautions identified by the fire risk assessment, and on who is nominated to use fire-fighting equipment and to assist with evacuation (e.g. fire wardens). The requirement to explain fire precautions should be welcomed, as often employees compromise fire precautions (e.g. wedge fire doors open) simply because they fail to understand the role of the fire precautions in fire safety.

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