

WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF THE HOSE REEL?

Theoretically, either portable extinguishers or hose reels may be provided in buildings. However, hose reels are arguably only supplementary to extinguishers. Extinguishers can be used quickly, while hose reels take longer to run out. However, hose reels provide an unlimited supply of water, thus enabling a greater degree of fire-fighting. Equally, for this reason, some fire services now recommend against hose reels, as their unlimited duration encourages occupants to remain in the building for longer than desirable.

Also, hose taken through a fire door, will prevent full closure of the door, possibly permitting spread of smoke and fire.

While there is, therefore, a move away from hose reels, Government guidance still recognises that they may have a place. The guides on the Fire Safety Order describe hose reels as "an effective firefighting facility". As with all safety equipment, the key is training in their use, to avoid the problems described. ■

Employers are advised that all staff should be familiar with the location and basic operating procedures for the equipment provided.

This is sensible, as it is unrealistic to expect all occupants to leave a small fire to grow until attendance of the fire and rescue service. Moreover, the benefits of fire extinguishing appliances are not always apparent from statistics, regarding fires to which the fire and rescue service were summoned. Trade surveys have indicated that 75%-80% of fires on which extinguishers and/or fire blankets were used were not even reported to the fire and rescue service, but were extinguished by occupants. A number of those reported to the fire and rescue service were also extinguished before the arrival of the fire and rescue service. In one survey, only 11% of the reported fires were extinguished by the fire and rescue service.

Nomination of staff to use fire extinguishers should be considered in every fire risk assessment. While all staff need not be nominated, it is unlikely that, other than in the case of very small, low risk premises, a fire risk assessment will validly conclude that no staff should ever use a fire extinguisher. Equally, an instruction that anyone discovering a fire should tackle the fire with a fire extinguishing appliance, if safe to do so, satisfies the legal requirement, provided staff are suitably instructed in the use of the appliances; all staff are effectively then "nominated" as the persons to use the fire extinguishing appliances. ■

Trading Tip!

Sell your products as life-saving devices - your customer must realise that they can't cut corners!
And don't forget, most large fires start as small fires!