

THE Burning Issue™

KEEPING YOU INFORMED ABOUT FIRE SAFETY LEGISLATION

Fire Risk Assessment - Some Questions Answered

The new Fire Safety Order requires that a fire risk assessment be carried out. This duty is imposed on both the Responsible Person and on any person having control of the premises; each needs to carry out their own fire risk assessment.

What is a fire risk assessment and what is its purpose?

A fire risk assessment is simply a methodical, structured examination of the risk to relevant persons from fire, taking into account the fire hazards, the means by which the hazards are controlled and the arrangements for protecting people from any fire, including both the physical and managerial arrangements.

The fire risk assessment forms a foundation for ongoing fire safety within the premises. The Fire Safety Order requires adequacy in respect of the "preventive and protective" measures, and these are the general fire precautions (means of escape, emergency escape lighting, signs, fire warning systems, fire extinguishers, training of staff, maintenance of equipment, etc) identified as necessary by the fire risk assessment.

The scope of a fire risk assessment arises logically from the definition of fire risk, which is generally regarded as a combination of the likelihood of fire and the harm that can occur to people if fire occurs. This is a major distinction between fire risk assessments, which form the underpinning for compliance with the Fire Safety Order, and fire certificates previously required under the Fire Precautions Act. The requirements of the Fire Precautions Act, and hence those set out in the fire certificate, were intended to prevent harm to people if fire occurred; they did not really prevent the outbreak of fire. A fire risk assessment is a more holistic process, by which not only is there consideration of the measures required to protect people in the event of fire, but the likelihood of fire is minimized.

The Fire Safety Order requires that the fire risk assessment is suitable and sufficient. How is this defined?

The term suitable and sufficient is not defined in the Fire Safety Order. However, each of the guides produced by the Government gives extensive guidance on fire risk assessment. Except in certain very small companies (employing less than five persons), there is a requirement for the "significant findings" to be documented. This is likely to include everything that the fire risk assessor has taken into account in making his assessment, such as the nature and size of the premises,
(continued overleaf)

