

15 Fire risk assessment principles

For church premises

The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (see also Methodist Insurance section)

The **Fire Safety Order** replaces most fire legislation with one simple order. It means that any person who has some level of control in the premises must take reasonable steps to reduce the risk from fire and make sure people can safely escape if there is a fire.

If you previously carried out a fire risk assessment under the Fire Precautions (Workplace) Regulations 1997, as amended 1999, and this assessment has been regularly reviewed, then all you will need to do now is to carry out another review taking account of those issues not covered by these Regulations. The Regulations apply to virtually all premises, every type of building, structure and open space. They do not apply to private dwellings.

The Fire Safety Order applies in England and Wales. It covers 'general fire precautions' and other fire safety duties, which are needed to protect 'relevant persons in case of **fire in and around** most 'premises'. Northern Ireland and Scotland have similar fire safety laws. The Fire (Scotland) Act 2005 has similar regulations (see under **further advice and information** at the end of this section).

The order requires fire precautions to be put in place '**where necessary**' and to the extent that it is '**reasonable and practical**' in the circumstances of the case.

Responsibility for complying with the Fire Safety Order rests with the '**Responsible Person**'. In a workplace this would normally be the employer or any person who may have control of any part of the premises.

Those legally responsible for churches, ie the Managing Trustees who constitute the Church Council or similar, are classed as the employer and will be responsible for appointing a '**Responsible Person**' who should carry out the Risk Assessment on behalf of the Trustees or Church Councils **who are legally responsible** for the implementation of the Fire Safety Order.

The Order does not require that a 'qualified' person has to carry out the Risk Assessment. In most cases this can be achieved without the need for any specialist or formal knowledge or training. The Managing Trustees can appoint one or more '**Competent Persons**' to assist them, and depending on the size of the premises, to carry out the preventative and protective measures required by the Order. (The 'Responsible Person' ie the Managing Trustee body can nominate one of their number or other specific named person for this purpose).

Fire risk assessment principles

The Fire Safety Order requires you to:

- 1 carry out a risk assessment identifying any possible dangers or risks
- 2 consider who may be especially at risk
- 3 remove or reduce the risk from fire as far as is reasonably possible and provide general fire precautions to deal with any possible risk left
- 4 provide:
 - means for detecting and giving a warning in case of fire,
 - means of escape and emergency lighting,
 - fire safety signs, and
 - fire fighting equipment
- 5 monitor and review the risk assessment and revise as appropriate
- 6 inform staff or their representative of the risks and provide training
- 7 plan for an emergency and record your findings.

Who enforces the Fire Safety Order?

The local Fire and Rescue Authority will enforce the order in most premises.

They have the power to inspect your premises to check that you are complying with your duties under the Fire Safety Order. They will look for evidence that you have carried out a suitable fire risk assessment and acted upon the significant findings of that assessment. If you have 5 or more employees you are required to keep a copy of the assessment.

In many premises the responsible person will be obvious but there may be times when a number of people will have some responsibility. In Church premises outside groups who hire the premises are also required to carry out their own assessments and the responsible person should ensure they have done so.

If the enforcing authority is dissatisfied with the outcome of your risk assessment or the action you have taken, they may issue an Enforcement Notice that requires you to make certain improvements or, in extreme cases, a Prohibition Notice that restricts the use of all or part of your premises until improvements are made.

Failure to comply with any duty imposed by the Order or any Notice issued by the enforcing authority is an offence. You have the right of appeal to a Magistrate's Court against any Notice issued. Where you agree that there is a need for improvements to your fire precautions but disagree with the enforcing authority on the technical solution (e.g. what type of fire alarm system is needed), you may agree to refer this for an independent determination.

What is a fire Risk Assessment?

A fire risk assessment is an organised and methodical look at your premises, the activities carried on there and the likelihood that a fire could start and cause harm to those in and around the premises.

The aims are to:

- Identify the hazards, reduce the **risk** of those **hazards** causing harm to as low as is reasonably practicable.
- To decide what physical fire precautions and management policies are necessary to ensure the safety of people in your building if a fire does start.

The term "**Risk**" means the chance of that harm occurring.

The term "**Hazard**" means anything that has the potential to cause harm.

If you have five or more employees, then the significant findings of the risk assessment, the actions taken and details of anyone especially at risk must be recorded. It will be helpful to keep a record even if you are not required to do so.

How to carry out a fire risk assessment

A fire risk assessment will help you determine the chances of a fire starting and the dangers from fire that your premises present for the people who use them and any person in the immediate vicinity. The assessment method suggested in this guide shares the same approach as that used in general Health and Safety Legislation.

Much of the information for your risk assessment will come from the knowledge you have along with your colleagues of the premises, as well as information given to you by people who have responsibility for other parts of the building. A tour of the premises will be needed to confirm, amend or add detail to your initial views.

It must take the whole of your premises into account, including outdoor locations. If the premises are small you may be able to assess them as a whole. In larger premises you may find it helpful to divide them into rooms or a series of assessment areas using natural boundaries, eg worship or assembly rooms, corridors, stairways and external routes.

Your fire risk assessment should demonstrate that, as far as is reasonable, you have considered the needs of disabled people.

There are five steps to a risk assessment

- Identify fire hazard
- Identify people at risk
- Evaluate, remove, reduce and protect from risk
- Record, plan, instruct, inform and train
- Review

Further advice and information

Further information is provided in the Technical Guidance handbook *Fire Risk Assessment*

Principles for Church Premises: the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 www.methodist.org.uk

