Fire Risk Assessment

Responsible Person

The 'responsible person' is someone who has control, or a degree of control, over premises or fire-protection systems within premises

For example, it could be:

- The owner, employer or manager of a business
- The owner or managing agent of premises which are shared between a number of businesses
- Individuals within a multiple-occupancy building, including self-employed people
- Manager of a charity or voluntary organisation
- A contractor with a degree of control over any premises
- Person providing accommodation for paying guests

The responsible person must carry out, or appoint a **Competent Person** to carry out a suitable and sufficient fire risk assessment of the risks of fire to their employees and others who may be affected by their work or business. Those who employ **five or more employees** should keep a formal record of any significant findings and remedial measures which have, or may need to be, taken.

If you are the responsible person, you must make sure that the fire-risk assessment is carried out. You can appoint some other **Competent Person** to do the actual assessment, but you are still responsible in law.

Competent Person

The competent person or fire risk assessor need not possess any specific academic qualifications but should:

- Understand the relevant fire safety legislation;
- Have appropriate education, training, knowledge and experience in the principles of fire safety;
- Have an understanding of fire development and the behaviour of people in fire;
- Understand the fire hazards, fire risks and relevant factors associated with occupants at special risk within the buildings of the type in question, and
- Have appropriate training and/or experience in carrying out fire risk assessments.

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Suitable and Sufficient

Whilst the legislation does not define suitable and sufficient it is generally considered that a risk assessment should do the following:

1. Identify the fire risks arising from or in connection with work:

Attention should be paid to sources of ignition, sources of fuel and work processes.

2. Identify the location of people at significant risk in case of fire:

It will be necessary to identify the areas that persons will frequent, whether they are employees, customers, visiting contractors etc.

3. Evaluate the risks:

- Are existing fire safety measures within the premises adequate?
- Are sources of fuel and ignition controlled?
- Is there adequate means for detecting fire and giving warning?
- Is there adequate means of escape in case of fire from all parts of the premises?
- Has adequate and appropriate fire-fighting equipment been provided, and is it suitably located?
- Is there an adequate testing and maintenance regime in place for fire precautions within the premises?
- Have employees been adequately trained in fire safety procedures within the premises and in the use of fire-fighting equipment?

4. Record findings and action taken:

Prepare an emergency plan, inform, instruct and give training to employees in fire precautions.

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5. Keep the assessment under review:

Generally the review date should be one year from the date of completion of the risk assessment; however it may be necessary to set an earlier date depending on the type of premises, processes carried out, etc.

Employers and the self-employed are expected to take reasonable steps to help themselves identify fire risks, e.g. by looking at appropriate sources of information such as legislation, and codes of practice or by reference to a competent individual.

For small premises presenting few or simple hazards a suitable and sufficient fire risk assessment can be a very straightforward process.

In many intermediate cases the fire risk assessment will need to be more sophisticated. Some areas of the assessment may require specialist advice such as in a particularly complicated building.

Large and complex premises will require the most developed and sophisticated fire risk assessments particularly where fire engineering solutions have been developed to overcome difficult fire safety issues.

Fire risk assessments must also consider all those who might be affected by the undertaking whether they are employees or others such as contractors working on site or members of the public. Particularly attention should be given to those individuals who are especially vulnerable, such as young persons, the elderly or those with disabilities.

Significant Findings

Significant findings should include:

- The significant hazards identified in the assessment. That is, those hazards which might pose serious risk to workers or others who might be affected by the work activities if they were not properly controlled;
- The existing control measures in place and the extent to which they control the risks (this need not replicate details of measures more fully described in works manuals etc. but could refer to them);
- The population which may be affected by these significant risks or hazards, including any groups of employees who are especially at risk.