

# FIRE SAFETY ADVICE FOR BUSINESSES



This advice has been provided to support Oxfordshire businesses in reducing the risk of fire during any period of industrial action by the fire and rescue service. Where further fire safety advice in relation to industrial action is required, please call 08000 325999.

During any proposed period(s) of industrial action, the fire and rescue service may not be able to respond to fire safety enquiries within normal timescales. It remains the responsibility of employers and other premises occupiers to comply with fire safety law. Information on how to achieve this and more general fire safety advice can be found below.

## **Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005**

The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 places a legal requirement upon employers and persons with responsibility for premises (responsible persons). These responsibilities and safety measures are designed to protect life from fire regardless of fire and rescue service intervention. It is therefore essential to ensure that all existing fire safety provisions are in place and effective. It is recommended that directors, senior managers and other persons with fire safety responsibilities satisfy themselves that the following aspects have been considered in local arrangements:

- Reviewing the arrangements for calling the fire and rescue service
- Response to Automatic Fire Alarms
- Business continuity planning
- General fire safety
- Reducing the risk of fire
- Incidents involving passenger lifts.

## **Reviewing the arrangements for calling the fire and rescue service**

In the event of fire a telephone call using the 999 system must be made at the earliest opportunity. A response will not follow a call received via Automatic Fire Alarms (see below) without further confirmation of a fire.

Check that effective arrangements are in place for a responsible person to meet fire crews on arrival and provide them with appropriate information - for example, the location of the nearest fire hydrant or other water supply.



## Response to Automatic Fire Alarms systems

To reduce unnecessary burdens on the fire and rescue service at this time, special care must be taken to minimise the possibility of unwanted automatic fire signals. A response by the fire and rescues service is unlikely to be made to calls received from automatic fire alarms without further confirmation of a fire. It is therefore essential that where automatic fire alarm systems are provided within your premises, that all appropriate employees / persons are aware of the need to call 999 in case of a confirmed fire and not to assume that the fire and rescue service will automatically attend.

Where any of your premises are used as dwellings and there are no appropriate employees / persons to check for signs of fire, tenants / occupiers should be made aware for the need to call 999 in case of a confirmed fire and not to assume that the fire and rescue service will automatically attend.

Where you have premises that are provided with automatic fire alarm systems and the fire instructions do not require a backup 999 telephone call, this change is to be brought to the attention of persons within the premises.

## Business continuity planning

Responsible persons are urged to make the best use of the time available to check their organisations preparedness and to review their contingency arrangements. Existing risk registers and risk assessments may be useful to identify and prioritise action. The following checklist will support your business continuity planning:

- Have the risks from fire been properly assessed and prioritised? Do these include risks to assets and business as well as risks to safety?
- Are there nominated staff to manage any emergency situation and limit damage?
- Is there a Business Recovery Plan in place and is it up to date?
- Are key records, emergency plans and contact details duplicated off site?
- Is there a detailed emergency fire plan in place? Is this up to date and has this been brought to the attention of all staff?
- Are all key staff aware of their duties and have they been properly trained?
- Have steps been taken to increase management inspections and review security to prevent arson and improve housekeeping?
- Are arrangements in place (during periods of industrial action) to call the fire and rescue service by using the 999 system rather than placing reliance on automatic systems?
- Can key staff can be contacted out of hours if necessary and are sufficient copies of emergency plans held in readiness off-site?
- Are all contact details contained in the plans current and correct?
- Special attention should be given to damage control and salvage arrangements in buildings and those containing business critical processes, information or other resources and in heritage buildings.

## General fire safety

The reduced level Fire and Rescue Service resource during any period of industrial action does not increase the chance of a fire occurring in a workplace or other premises. However, the vigilance of all staff can reduce the risk of fire.

In advance of any industrial action on the part of the fire and rescue service, business owners and managers should ensure that:

- The fire risk assessment for the premises is up to date and has been acted on.
- Measures to reduce the risk of fire are in place and are working.
- Fire precautions in the building are well maintained (e.g. fire alarms, emergency lighting, sprinklers).
- Fire exits are all unobstructed and available.
- The premises emergency plan is up to date and appropriate to ensure evacuation in case of fire without the need for fire and rescue service assistance.
- All staff know what to do in case of fire.
- Ensure that fire resisting doors and shutters are kept closed as far as practicable to limit the spread of fire and smoke.
- Appropriate fire-fighting equipment is available, serviced and ready for use.

Briefings for senior staff, reviewing of risk assessments and validation of emergency plans are key features that should form part of your preparation and response. You will wish to check the arrangements you have in place, make any necessary adjustments and ensure that employees, residents and other persons are aware of the risk reduction measures for the premises and the actions they should take in the case of fire.

## Reducing the risk of fire

We strongly recommend that businesses and other organisations consider what additional measures they can put in place to prevent the occurrence of fire and limit damage if a fire does occur in their premises. This will assist in protecting staff and visitors and with achieving compliance with existing legal duties.

As part of this you should consider the implications of, and risks associated with, the potentially reduced fire and rescue service response and, where appropriate, instigate supplementary measures and arrangements to prevent incidents and minimise the consequences of reduced fire and rescue service response.

Examples of such measures might include the following:

- To deter arson, ensure that perimeter security is sound and that materials stored in the open (including waste) are kept well away from buildings.
- Delaying certain activities if they pose an increased risk of fire.
- Ensuring extra attention is paid to the control of activities presenting a high risk of ignition such as smoking and 'hot works', (e.g. welding).

- Rescheduling deliveries of flammable substances to periods outside of Fire and Rescue Service industrial action.
- Lowering inventories of substances/items that are flammable or toxic.
- Ensure storage of combustible material and highly flammable substances is appropriate.
- Ensure quantities of highly flammable material that you use are kept to a minimum.
- Ensure heat sources (naked flame, electrical equipment, welding, grinding, hot light sources etc.) are managed and kept away from combustible materials.
- Increasing the frequency of patrols or inspections to enforce the highest standards of housekeeping. In particular make sure staircases, other escape routes and high fire risk areas are kept free from any accumulation of waste or storage.

However, businesses should ensure that such measures do not increase the risks of an incident of another nature. As an example, delaying safety critical maintenance by avoiding 'hot works' may introduce additional risk.

## **Incidents involving passenger lifts**

If you have lifts in your building you should ensure that, in the event of a lift becoming stuck, clear advice is available on how to contact the responsible maintenance company. It is recommended that maintenance contracts should be checked to ensure that 'call out' arrangements are adequately covered and that in car communications are functional. Furthermore details should be made available in the lift and where alarm calls are received in the building and should include address details for the building concerned.

Calls to the fire and rescue service should only be made if persons in the lift are at immediate risk of injury or in sufficient distress to require the attendance of an ambulance. It should be noted that the fire and rescue service response may not be immediate.

## **For business fire safety advice:**



08000 325999



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