



Taking the heat out of fire risk assessments



Fire in the built environment can be a killer, we have seen this in the recent Grenfell Tower catastrophe. Early indications suggest that several elements added to the potential risk of a fire spreading which may have included the mis-understanding of a person's responsibility when an alarm sounded, poor quality materials and possibly inadequate Fire Risk Assessments.

The government upped the ante on fire safety in 2005 when it introduced new legislation that adopted a risk-assessment based approach. This stipulates that every organisation should appoint a 'responsible person' to arrange or carry out a fire risk assessment of the areas for which they have management control.

For office tenants, this means the workspace in which they operate but in a multi-occupied property, they also need to be aware of the fire risk assessment for the common parts held by the landlord or property manager.

The government has produced a very helpful and comprehensive guide to fire risk assessment for offices and shops which, at 146 pages, tells you everything you could possibly want to know. However, a five-step checklist by the DCLG provides an at-a-glance summary to make the task easier.

However, in a nutshell, the fire risk assessment should review the following:

- fire safety signage
- fire fighting and detection equipment – are they regularly maintained?
- potential fire hazards, ignition sources and combustible materials
- current protocols for fire prevention and management
- means of escape in the case of fire, ensuring that these are kept clear
- an emergency fire evacuation plan
- provision of information to employees and other people on the premises
- staff fire safety training and drills



At TAP we promote 5 areas occupiers should look to focus on;

1. **Communication:** In a multi-occupied property there are separate areas of fire precaution responsibility which are overseen by the landlord (or their managing agent) or the tenant. In both situations, there needs to be a clear path of communication between all parties so they know what the other is doing.
2. **Paperwork:** Systems and equipment need to be maintained and the relevant paperwork kept for audit purposes. Whether it's your fire extinguishers/systems or your emergency lighting they all need to be properly maintained. There should be no question of attending to your obligations.
3. **Housekeeping:** To make sure combustible materials are stored properly, evacuations routes are clear and protected (no propping open of Fire Doors) and the correct signage is in place. A regular review of these areas is essential.
4. **Educate:** All occupiers, together with their Fire Wardens and their staff, need to be fully conversant with how to evacuate the property should a fire occur. Occupiers have a duty to be aware of the evacuation routes and assembly points and where necessary separate plans must be put in place for disabled or vulnerable individuals.
5. **Practice:** Practice, practice, practice. Whether it's how the alarm sounds in the event of a fire or where the escape routes/assembly points are located.

Regular reviews are important to ensure that the risk assessment report is up to date. The UK Fire Risk Advisory Service recommends that companies consider annually whether an update is necessary - and sooner in the event of material alterations to a building or its contents.