

Information Paper

Managing fire risk in commercial buildings

A guide for facilities managers

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This Information Paper provides targeted guidance on how to deliver fire resilience in commercial buildings through improved facilities management. It is the latest in a series of BRE publications providing guidance for facilities managers, maintenance contractors and building owners on a number of issues relating to the operation and management of commercial buildings.

In England and Wales, employers and other persons who have control of premises are required by legislation^[1] to carry out an assessment of the fire risks to occupants of buildings and other people in the vicinity, to ensure that they are safe from fire and its effects. The first part of this Information Paper explains the basic methodology behind carrying out a fire risk assessment before considering how best to deal with residual risks. The second part gives a brief overview of the operation and maintenance requirements for fire detection systems, fire suppression systems, firefighting equipment and emergency lighting.

Fire risk assessment: identifying hazards and people in the premises

The aims of a fire risk assessment are:

- to identify the fire hazards
- to ensure the risk of those hazards causing harm is as low as reasonably practicable
- to decide what physical fire precautions and management arrangements are necessary to ensure the safety of people in the premises if a fire does start. Depending on the context, it may also be desired to protect property, ensure business continuity and protect the environment.

Whilst there is no single universally accepted standard for undertaking risk assessments, there are a number of methods – including a series by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) on fire safety risk assessment in different



Figure 1: In England and Wales, employers are required to carry out an assessment of the fire risks to occupants of buildings

types of occupancy^[2] and PAS 79:2012 (*Fire risk assessment – Guidance and a recommended methodology*)^[3] – which follow a common five-step methodology similar to that outlined below.

The person carrying out a fire risk assessment in line with these methodologies should be competent to do so. The DCLG publications define ‘competent’ as ‘a person with enough training and experience or knowledge and other qualities to enable them properly to assist in undertaking the preventative and protective measures’. For more complex assessments, the necessary competency may not reside with a single individual, but will instead be provided by a team, including those with relevant local knowledge.

Step 1: Hazard identification

A fire can start when a source of sufficient heat is brought into contact with a combustible material (or flammable liquid) in the presence of oxygen (air). This is represented by the fire triangle in Figure 2.