

Managing Risk: support for business

Retail premises

Retail premises can range from small high street shops, to out-of-town shopping centres, to supermarkets, to a single shop in a shopping mall, to the shopping mall itself. The premises are open to all members of the public, including children, the elderly and the disabled, usually with no restriction over access.

Contents and stock vary greatly too – from metal goods to plastic toys, to clothing and upholstered furniture. All of which could present a fire risk. Large open plan premises allow the unchecked spread of fire and smoke. In turn, this can damage stock throughout a building.

Multi-storey shopping centres, supermarkets and department stores need to protect the health and safety of shoppers and have an effective evacuation plan and suitable employee training. Shopping Malls are particularly susceptible to slips, trips and falls if there's no cleaning plan in place – especially during poor or severe weather. Having CCTV can help defend against false claims of slips, trips and falls, as well as theft.

It is little wonder then that good and effective management and employee training, including fast detection of fires, by fire alarm or employee detection, is key to fast and safe evacuation of retail premises and notification to the fire service.





What the law says

Most of us know we need to comply with fire safety regulations in the workplace. The main two are:

- **The Building Regulations – covers design and construction of buildings at new build and at refurbishment stage.**
- **The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 – covers management of fire safety in occupied buildings.**

Fire safety legislation affects the design and construction of buildings and work practices. The Building Regulations are typically implemented by adhering to guidance provided in Approved Document B to the Building Regulations in England and Wales. They apply to new build, extensions to an existing building, or material change of use. They also control the layout, design, construction materials and separation of buildings by using fire-resisting compartments to limit fire spreading, and ensure people in the building know if there is a fire and can escape to safety.

Once the building is occupied, the responsibility passes from local authorities to the local fire and rescue authority. Fire certificates aren't needed anymore, and instead the emphasis is on fire prevention and reducing the risk of fire. Responsibilities under the Order now affect the employer, employees, contractors, visitors and volunteers.

You'll need a 'competent person' to carry out an effective fire risk assessment and implement the fire prevention and protection measures identified in the risk assessment. The owner or manager can nominate themselves as the competent person.

In short, the competent person has a large responsibility and must have a broad knowledge of fire and fire processes and the premises layout to carry out a fire risk assessment. They need to know about:

- **Combustibility of typical materials**
- **Inception hazards**
- **What's needed to sustain a fire**
- **How fires spread**
- **How to contain fires**
- **How to suppress fire**
- **Fire detection and warning systems**
- **Means of escape**
- **Presence of dangerous substances**





Things to look out for

Fire loads and hazards

There are obvious fire loads, for example, racks of clothing, fabrics, soft furnishings, rolls of carpet, and items in cardboard and plastic packaging. It's easy to overlook smaller items such as aerosols, which may be flammable and can explode if exposed to high temperatures or fire. Hardware and DIY stores can hold paints and thinners and other solvents close to combustible stocks (e.g. timber).

Poor housekeeping is a major factor. Cardboard and combustible packaging stored untidily in the premises, or overstuffed wheelie bins close to the building outside make it easier for fires – whether started by arson, electrical fault or discarded smoking materials – to ignite and spread. They can also block routes into and out of the building.

Premises themselves can add to the risk. Old multi-storey Victorian buildings may not have layout and plan details. Floors and stairs are often timber and they may have attics and basements and there may be hidden voids and shafts. Professionally installing, maintaining and regularly inspecting electrical equipment is imperative in older buildings.

Ignition sources

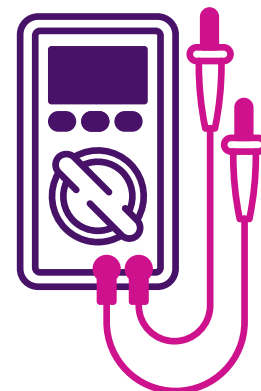
- **Arson** – either by incendiary devices through letterboxes or acts of vandalism. Examples include setting fire to wheelie bins or packaging waste against an external building wall.
- **Electrical** – overloaded circuits, damaged leads, multiple adaptors and extension leads, unchecked or unmaintained wiring, equipment and portable appliances. Portable heating appliances can also be ignition sources.
- **Lighting** – in particular, traditional incandescent bulbs located too close to combustible materials. Bulbs may shatter, so don't store goods in a way that hinders ventilation and cooling of air circulating around light fittings. Position display lighting over goods so it won't lead to overheating – especially if a premises is unoccupied.
- **Smoking** – employees and customers' surreptitious smoking and smoking around waste bins are obvious hazards.
- **Cooking** – customer cafes, staff canteens, kitchens and cooking facilities all present fire hazards, unless there are strict maintenance and cleaning regimes, especially for extract ducting.
- **Occupants** – all members of the public including children, the elderly and disabled, as well as employees and contractors. Some may be under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
- **Sales** – these attract large amounts of people into retail parks and department stores.



Risk control advice

Eliminate hazards by:

- Prohibiting portable heaters throughout the building
- Prohibiting personal electric devices and chargers, unless they're part of a PAT testing regime
- Fire stopping penetrations through walls and floors in multi-storey buildings.
- Installing automatic fire and smoke dampers where ducts pass through compartment walls
- Ensuring fire doors are in good condition and fitted with the right smoke seals and intumescent strips
- Ensuring glazing is up to standard.



Minimise hazards:

- Arson – ensure waste skips and bins are at least 10 metres from the building.
- Smoking – ensure there's no smoking close to waste bins or roller shutters (delivery bays) where cigarette ends can blow back in.
- Windows and doors – secure them at the end of each working day to protect against arson and theft.
- Stop valves for gas supplies – ensure they're not blocked and easy to find and turn off safely in an emergency.
- Follow regulations – inspect wiring installed in the building as set out in BS7671 Requirements for Electrical installations and IEE Wiring Regulations. Faulty electrical equipment, wiring and fittings are now largely controlled under the Electricity at Work Regulations 1989.
- Stock – avoid storing goods or having displays close to lighting.
- Waste – remove or tidy internal and external waste regularly.
- Slips, trips and falls – implement a good cleaning regime and employee reporting, plus provide slip and trip hazards training.
- Good housekeeping – implement strict maintenance and cleaning regimes for kitchen cooking equipment, especially ducting.



Make sure you provide:

- A suitable and sufficient fire risk assessment and evacuation plan.
- Fire alarm installation with automatic detection.
- Sprinklers for larger open-plan premises.
- Appropriate numbers and location of fire extinguishers.
- High housekeeping standards.
- Good physical security protection to the building and external areas.
- Monitored intruder alarm to detect point of entry by possible arsonists and/or thieves.
- Suitable employee training.



Health and safety – slips, trips and falls

People should be able to move around safely, and the Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992 requires floors to be suitable, in good condition, and free from obstructions.

A good cleaning regime is key to preventing slips and trips, particularly in adverse weather conditions. Formalise training, including refresher training, for appropriate staff that encompasses using PPE and cleaning equipment. For example, wet weather means monitoring the entrance to a shopping mall or installing the right flooring in a particular area of the building.

Checklist

- Look at work areas and discuss tasks – e.g. maintenance and cleaning to identify potential risks.
- Check the condition of flooring and where it might need replacing and identify any places where it can get slippery when wet. Look for places where spillages might occur.
- Check for leaks accumulating on floors.
- Spot the build-up of floor contamination, and clear it up as soon as possible, especially during wet weather.
- Look for ad hoc measures to control leaks, such as corrugated cardboard or warning signs left in place for long periods.
- Consider the age and construction of buildings and whether there is evidence of leaking roofs, walkways exposed to the elements, or the potential for water and mud to be brought into the store via wet clothing, shoes or vehicles.
- Identify cluttered walkways, build-up of waste materials, general untidiness, narrow access routes, trailing cables, and where workers or customers have to queue etc.
- Ensure lighting levels are appropriate.
- Storage of combustible materials in fire exit routes



Other useful information

- **The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005**
- **The Electricity at Work Regulations 1989**
- **The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 (HSW Act)**
- **The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999**
- **The Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992**
- **Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act, 2005**
- **Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (General Application) Regulations 2007**
- https://www.besmart.ie/fs/doc/Small_Business/Documents/Health_and_Safety_in_Small_Retail_Premises_information_sheet.pdf

