Fire Risk Assessment – A Guide

This guidance document has been produced to assist you to carry out a fire risk assessment and record the main findings. This is a suggested method for use in HMO's that are not large or complex. You do not have to use this format and there are other methods of risk assessment that may be just as valid.

Your Risk Assessment must be undertaken by someone who can demonstrate competence they must have both 'sufficient training and experience' or alternatively he must possess 'knowledge and other qualities', which will in both cases, enable the assessment to be completed properly. This does not necessarily mean that they have undergone a recognised training course but this will be easier to demonstrate if they have. Furthermore if you are instructing or commissioning fire risk assessments you also have an obligation to take reasonable steps to ensure that the person undertaking the risk assessment is competent. We would recommend that in these circumstances that you ask the contractor to demonstrate any training and experience they have and any relevant certification.

A Fire Risk Assessment is a tool to identify potential fire hazards and enable actions to be taken to remove or reduce these hazards to as low a level as practically possible and then decide what physical fire precautions and management arrangements are necessary to ensure people's safety.

Please note that the completion of a fire risk assessment does not demonstrate compliance with the requirement to undertake ongoing routine management of a House in Multiple Occupation (HMO) as prescribed by The Management of House in Multiple Occupation (England) Regulations 2006. For more information on the management for HMO's and available downloads, please visit our website:

http://www.welhat.gov.uk/hmo

What is a Fire Risk Assessment?

A fire risk assessment is an organised and methodical look at the premises, the activities carried on there and the likelihood that a fire could start and cause harm to those in and around the premises. In most properties it will be straightforward to carry out a fire risk assessment, but in large or mixed use properties specialist advice may be required.

The aims of the Fire Risk Assessment are:

To identify the fire hazards;
To reduce the risk to as low as reasonably practicable; and
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.
A "hazard" is anything that has the potential to cause harm and the "risk" is the chance of that harm occurring.

This is a suggested method for carrying out a Fire risk Assessment, (although the following gives an overview of how to undertake a risk assessment any method that achieves the above aims will be acceptable).

The fire risk assessment should be carried out in a practical and systematic way and enough time must be allocated to the exercise. It may be useful to subdivide larger and mixed use premises into rooms or a series of assessment areas using natural boundaries (for example kitchens, offices and stores; and corridors stairways and external routes).
The process can be broken down into five steps:

1. Identify fire hazards
2. Identify people at risk
3. Evaluate, remove or reduce risk and protect against remaining risk
4. Record, plan and inform or train
5. Review

Step 1: Identify the Hazards within the Premises

For a fire to start, three things are required: a source of ignition, fuel and oxygen. If any one of these is absent, a fire cannot start. Taking measures to avoid the three coming together will therefore reduce the chances of a fire occurring.

1. Sources of ignition; these may include:

Smokers' materials such as cigarettes, matches and lighters;
Naked flames, for example candles and night lights;

Electric, gas or oil-fired heaters (fixed or portable); boilers;

Cookers, toasters and other kitchen equipment (especially when shared);

Faulty or misused electrical equipment;

Electric blankets, computers, TVs, washing machines and dryers;
Lighting equipment (fixed and movable), for example halogen lamps and table lamps;

The electrical installation itself; such as old and outdated wiring and fuse boxes, and;

The overloading of electrical sockets;

The gas installation.

2. Sources of fuel; these may include:

Furniture, furnishings, textiles, bedding, clothing, curtains and laundry;

Accumulations of unwanted mail, waste paper, cardboard, newspapers and magazines (including that awaiting recycling collection);

Waste storage and refuse containers;

Flammable liquid-based products such as paint, varnish, thinner, adhesives, white spirit, methylated spirit and cooking oils;
Liquefied gas (LPG), paraffin, heating oils and petrol;

Decorations for seasonal and religious occasions;

Plastics and rubber such as videotapes, polyurethane foam-filled furniture and polystyrene-based display materials. Also wall, floor and ceiling coverings and surface finishes.

Note: Compliance with the regulations concerning gas, electrical and furniture safety will reduce the risk presented by some of the items listed above.

Particular care should be taken when premises are undergoing alteration, repair or redecoration. At such times flammable materials may be stored in the premises, possibly in escape routes or in rooms which are otherwise unused. Care should be taken as to where and how these products are stored. Premises which normally have good fire precautions and present a low fire risk may have their fire safety compromised by temporary careless storage of these products or by the disabling of fire precautions during the period of works.

3. Sources of Oxygen

In domestic premises the oxygen source will be the air in the building and where only normal natural domestic ventilation is provided the risk will generally be normal.

Step 2: Identify people at Risk

In general this will be the occupiers and their visitors and anybody working in the premises such as a caretaker or cleaner and any visiting contractors. Only in buildings with mixed residential and commercial use are there likely to be other people to consider.

The fire risk assessment should consider people at risk, who may include:

People asleep (who will be disorientated and slow to respond);

People who are unfamiliar with the premises (guests and visitors);

People with disabilities (including mobility impairment and hearing or vision impairment);

People who may have some other reason for not being able to leave the premises quickly (such as parents with young children);

People who are sensorial impaired due to alcohol, drugs or medication; unaccompanied children and young people;

Anyone working in enclosed isolated parts of the building;

and anyone who has difficulty understanding English.

When evaluating the risk to people with disabilities it may be necessary to discuss their individual needs with them or seek professional advice.

Step 3: Evaluate, Remove or Reduce Risk and Protect against Remaining Risk

Hazards should be removed where it is practicable to do so, and where they cannot be removed they should be reduced as far as possible. What is considered reasonable in a particular case will depend on an evaluation of the potential to cause harm and the likelihood of that harm occurring.

Some simple examples are given below:

Replace portable heating appliances with fixed convector heaters or a central heating system;

Ensure electrical sockets are adequate in number and sited appropriately to avoid overloading and trailing leads;

Ensure electrical, mechanical and gas equipment is installed, used, maintained and protected in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions;

Ensure all furniture complies with the Furniture (Fire) (Safety) Regulations 1988;

Ensure combustible items such as furniture, laundry and decorations are stored properly and are kept away from potential ignition sources such as cookers, heaters and boilers;

Ensure refuse is properly stored and disposed of; and in crowded accommodation, provide adequate shelving and cupboard space so that everyday items are not in proximity to cookers, heaters and so on.

Having taken measures to remove or reduce fire hazards as far as is practicable, adequate fire precautions should be in place to warn people in the event of a fire and to allow them to escape to a place of safety.

Guidance on the appropriate type of fire alarm and detection systems can be found on our website www.welhat.gov.uk/HMO.

More detailed guidance can be found in LACORS Housing – Fire Safety 'Guidance on fire safety provisions for certain types of existing housing.

Step 4: Record, Plan, Inform, Instruct and Train

Your HMO Licence places a requirement that having undertaken the risk assessment you must make a written record of the "significant findings". The significant findings are the actions to be taken as a result of the assessment and details of anyone at particular risk. Significant findings should include details of:

The fire hazards that have been identified (but ignore trivial things such as a tin of solvent-based glue);

The actions taken, or which will be taken, to remove or reduce the chance of a fire occurring (preventative measures);

Persons who may be at rick, particularly those especially at risk;

The actions taken, or which will be taken, to reduce the risk to people from the spread of fire and smoke (protective measures);

The actions people need to take if a fire occurs. For most HMO's this will simply be to evacuate the property in the case of a fire and to summon the Fire & Rescue Service.

Any information, instruction and training identified as being required, and how it will be given; and any discussions that have taken place with residents (or if appropriate, with staff).

An example template can be found at the end of this document, however, any alternative format will be acceptable provided it contains all the information above and forms a 'suitable and sufficient risk assessment'.

An appropriate emergency plan should be put in place. In most residential accommodation this is unlikely to extend beyond advising residents what to do in the event of a fire or fire alarm and how to contact the Fire & Rescue Service. In large or mixed se premises a more sophisticated plan may be necessary.

Step 5: Review

We recommend the Fire Risk Assessment to be reviewed every 12 months and if you suspect it is no longer valid or there are any significant changes in your premises for example; structural alterations or new occupiers.

The general fire precautions in the premises should be reviewed regularly. We recommend an inspection every month and where problems are identified they should be dealt with as soon as possible and any actions recorded.

These checks should be incorporated into your routine management checks, where you are checking for compliance with the HMO Management Regulations, things to include;

- Checking the hot water and heating is working correctly
- Gas and electrical safety
- Disrepair in bedrooms and common parts; including windows, carpets, hand rails, walls, ceilings.
- Cleanliness of the common parts
- Damp and mould
- Fire precautions; disrepair to fire doors, fire alarm system

- Untidy and unsafe gardens
- Waste
- Managers details still visible in a common part

Annual Checks

An annual inspection for the fire alarm system and emergency lighting should also be carried out by a qualified person and certified. Whilst there is a prescribed form for Grade A systems and testing of emergency lighting, there is no prescribed form Grade D systems. We have one available to download from our website.