



# FIRE – HOW YOUR BUSINESS CAN TACKLE THE DANGER



## THE THREAT

**Fire is among the most serious dangers we face. The United Kingdom Fire and Rescue Services attended 799,000 fire and false alarm incidents in 2007/08, and UK fire deaths increased by 8% to 500 in 2007/08.<sup>1</sup>**

Fire causes loss, damage and disruption; and the cost of dealing with its aftermath is rising for businesses. The Association of British Insurers (ABI) has recently reported that, in 2008, the cost of fire damage rose by 16% compared with 2007 to a record £1.3billion - £3.4million every day.

The ABI's figures show that in 2008 the cost of commercial fire damage rose by 15 per cent to £865million. School fires alone cost £33million, whilst fire damage to

homes cost £408million, up 17 per cent on the previous year.

*"These are alarming figures. They highlight both the importance of fire insurance, and reducing and managing the fire risk,"* said Nick Starling of the ABI. *"We know that arson tends to increase during an economic downturn. Insurers are reporting a rise in large-scale fires that are increasingly putting lives at risk."*

## FIRE LEGISLATION FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

In recent years the Government has endeavoured to address the major issue of fire prevention by streamlining the relevant legislation. Until 2006 UK fire safety laws were scattered across more than 70 different pieces of legislation, all with many implications on businesses, and some with overlaps between their requirements. This was often confusing to businesses as they attempted to comply with the law. In 2005 The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order (RRFSO) was approved by Parliament in order to 'simplify, rationalise and consolidate existing leg-

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islation'. The RRFSO came into law on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2006 in England and Wales, and has heralded the biggest reform of fire safety legislation in 30 years.

The Government's aim for the RRFSO was to make fire safety law easier to understand by doing away with the existing 70 separate pieces of legislation and replacing them with a new regime focussed on preventing fires happening in the first place. The new rules apply to most places except private houses, and cover nearly every type of building, structure and open space. Moreover, the Government has also specified more clearly who has responsibility for fire prevention within organisations. From 1<sup>st</sup> October 2006,



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the task of fire safety lies firmly with employers, with those who are self-employed with premises, with those responsible for buildings with public access, with voluntary organisations and with any contractor who exercises a degree of control over any premises. These 'responsible persons' have a duty to ensure the safety of everyone who uses their premises and those in the immediate vicinity who may be at risk if there is a fire.

## SUMMARY OF THE FIRE SAFETY ORDER

Copies of the RRFSO are available from <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/fire/regulatoryreformfire>

### Listed below are the key points for businesses to note:

- All previous fire legislation has been repealed.
- Fire certificates are no longer issued.
- Each individual company is responsible for their own fire safety.
- The employer must conduct a fire risk assessment regardless of the size of the risk. The identified responsible person will therefore take full corporate liability.
- If five or more people are employed, this risk assessment must be documented.
- The area to consider as part of risk assessment has been extended to include property safety, fire fighter safety and the environment around the site, as well as just protecting life. This means that allowing a building to be sacrificed is unacceptable due to the risk to neighbouring buildings and to fire fighters. The responsible person would have a duty to protect the fire brigade.
- There is an emphasis on business continuity and containing and preventing the spread of small fires. The effectiveness of fire extinguishers is clearly recognised as a major provision in doing just this.
- Protection is explicitly extended to all occupants and not just employees. Visitors, contractors or passers-by also have to be considered in the risk assessment.
- Fire fighters now have greater authority to gain entry to premises and remove samples after a fire.

## RESPONSIBILITY FOR FIRE PREVENTION

In general it is the employer with control of a workplace who has responsibility for fire prevention on the premises. However, this responsibility can be shared with other personnel, such as a building or

facilities manager who has control over part or all of a building, or the premises owner if a building is empty. It is worth noting that whoever is specified as 'the responsible person' will be held accountable in the event of an incident. In addition, under the Fire Safety Order he or she will be strongly advised to nominate a competent supplier of fire prevention equipment, one that can demonstrate it has 'the appropriate skills and experience'.

When selecting an external fire safety consultant or supplier it is advisable to choose a company that is approved by a recognised body, such as the National Security Inspectorate (NSI) that has approved third party certification under the NSI LPS1014<sup>3</sup> or the BAFE SP203<sup>4</sup> schemes. The NSI is the leading approvals and certification body that inspects companies providing home security, business security and fire safety services. NSI approved contractors can help your business when you are trying to



select equipment and alarms; they will assist you in making the right choice for your business and provide advice on how to comply with legislation. For further information see [www.gbsg.co.uk/fire.asp](http://www.gbsg.co.uk/fire.asp) or [www.nsi.org.uk](http://www.nsi.org.uk).

## WHAT CAN BE DONE TO PREVENT FIRE?

There is a significant amount that business can do to help themselves when it comes to fire prevention.

*Your risk assessment should be reviewed regularly to keep it a "live" document. In particular, it should be updated following any significant changes...*

## MINIMISE THE RISK OF FIRE BREAKING OUT

This is the number one priority in your fire safety strategy, as well as being a requirement of fire safety law. Good housekeeping, including some simple (free) steps such as banning smoking, testing electrical appliances, removing electrical heaters and training staff can have a positive impact on reducing the risk of fire.

## APPOINT A RESPONSIBLE PERSON TO ATTEND YOUR FIRE PROCEDURES

This person will ensure the system is regularly tested, inspected and serviced and all events are recorded in the logbook.

## CONDUCT FIRE RISK ASSESSMENTS

Every commercial organisation has a legal

responsibility to carry out a fire risk assessment. When conducting assessments, it is useful to follow these 3 steps recommended in the RRFSO:

1. Identify the Fire Hazards
2. Identify People at Risk
3. Evaluate, Remove, Reduce and Protect from Risk

Your risk assessment should be reviewed regularly to keep it a "live" document. In particular, it should be updated following any significant changes in your premises; significant changes in staffing levels or work processes, or if you've had a near miss fire incident or a real fire. Even with no changes to your site, it is good practice to review your risk assessment at intervals not exceeding 12 months.

## CONDUCT FIRE TRAINING

'A sufficient number of competent persons must be available to implement procedures for the safe evacuation of relevant persons from the premises...' RRFSO 2005, Article 15. You need to ensure that both specialist personnel (fire wardens, fire marshals) and staff in general are trained appropriately to deal with fire incidents. The 'responsible person' must be trained in the everyday testing and use of the fire detection equipment.

## CONSULT WITH ALL INTERESTED PARTIES

It is important that you consult with persons including your system supplier, fire officer, building controller and insurer over any aspect of change in building use or shape to ensure you will still be compliant with the RRFSO.

## PURCHASE RELIABLE FIRE DETECTION SYSTEMS

Reliable Fire Detection Systems only activate in response to genuine incidents. There were 441,600 false fire alarms in one 12 month period, which breaks down to over 1200 false call outs per day, over 50 an hour every day.<sup>2</sup> In response, the Chief Fire Officers' Association (CFOA) has been forced to toughen up its policy on False Fire Alarms. The Policy, which was re-launched at the Fire & Rescue 2008 Conference in Liverpool on 28 August 2008, now focuses on all fire detection and alarm systems instead of alarms only received through Alarm Receiving Centres. The full document can be downloaded from [www.cfoa.org.uk/10038](http://www.cfoa.org.uk/10038). In essence if premises continually instigate False Fire Alarms, whether through a lack of training or reliable equipment, the Fire Brigade will limit, or even withdraw, the service provided by the Fire and Rescue Service for a specified time. In order to ensure that businesses are given a





reasonable period to adjust their policies and working practices, the CFOA consider that this policy should be fully implemented by 01 September 2009.

Whilst the main focus of your fire protection strategy should be to prevent fire, should a fire accidentally break out early automatic fire detection is essential. Every second saved through early warning facilities could make the difference to a site's ability to recover from a fire without too much disruption. Fire Detection systems provide the earliest possible warning of a developing emergency situation, which in turn, can facilitate safe and swift evacuation of people from your premises. There are many types of detection technologies for sensing and detecting the presence of smoke, heat or other early indications of fire.

#### **MAINTAIN FIRE DETECTION SYSTEMS**

One critical part of an organisation's facilities management is to ensure the correct maintenance of any automatic fire detection and alarm system fitted in the build-

ing. The British Standard (BS5839 part 1), covering all aspects of the design, installation and maintenance of fire alarm systems, has recently been revised and includes changes that may affect how you approach your maintenance planning.

Service and maintenance is essential to extend the life of your system, reduce false alarms and ensure it works when it's needed most - if there's a fire. Regular service and maintenance on your fire alarm system will keep it in perfect condition and help minimise unwanted alarms from equipment faults.

#### **APPOINT A REPUTABLE COMPANY**

A reputable company should provide installation and servicing in accordance with BS 5893-1: 2002. When appointing a provider you should consider companies that have approved third party certification under the NSI, LPS1014<sup>3</sup> or the BAFE SP203<sup>4</sup> schemes. This means they will fully support your system (irrespective of manufacturer or software protocol) by providing trained engineers, spares and fault finding and repair capabilities. By

appointing an accredited supplier, you will not only be complying with CFOA guidance, you will also be investing in the safety of your staff, your premises and your job.

GB Security Group has been installing fire alarms for nearly 20 years and has built a reputation for providing well-designed, reliable systems. All systems are custom designed to ensure that they meet the exact requirements of your site. By offering a total security service GB Security Group can combine your fire alarm with other services, such as intruder, CCTV and access control. GB Security Group is accredited under both the NSI Gold Scheme and BAFE, so you can be sure that their service is professional and complies with current legislation. Remember, the CFOA has given businesses until September 2009 to address any issues with their alarm systems, so it's worth booking a free review of your fire prevention and detection systems as soon as possible. For free advice please contact GB Security Group on **01775 821100** or e-mail **enquiries@gbsg.co.uk**

#### **USEFUL REFERENCES**

- 1 [www.communities.gov.uk/publications/corporate/statistics/monitorq12008](http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/corporate/statistics/monitorq12008)
- 2 Statistics published by the Department of Communities and Local Government, Fire Statistics Monitor, UK, 12 months to June 2005.
- 3 The LPS1014 scheme certifies companies and organisations with the capabilities to competently carry out all aspects of the design, installation commission and servicing work required
- 4 Established in 1984, BAFE is a non-profit making organisation dedicated to improving standards in fire protection. [www.bafe.org.uk/](http://www.bafe.org.uk/)