

Fire safety checklist for employers

A free guide from Marsh Commercial



COVID-19: Fire safety checklist for employers

Despite the major changes that the fight against COVID-19 has introduced, fire safety requirements remain the same for business owners. Whether you're planning to reopen or have remained operational throughout lockdown it's likely that your fire risks have changed.

This could be because there's new risks from being closed for a period of time. Or it could be because the way in which you're working now has changed, and so there's new fire risks that you may not have experienced before.

What's crucial for you as an employer is to be aware of any changes in working conditions – or to the layout of your premises – and review your fire risk assessment (FRA) to make sure it's still suitable and sufficient when you reopen your doors.

So, what changes could be affecting the validity of your fire risk assessment? Let's take a look:



What does the law say?

If you have five or more employees, you're legally required to have an up-to-date fire risk assessment, according to the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.



For businesses that are closed due to COVID-19

If you've closed your doors due to lockdown, you might think that your fire risk reduces in some way because the premises are not in use. That's not the case. There are some vital fire safety considerations you must make when you've shut your doors. Here are just a few of them:

- **Arson** - have you considered what risk your business is at from arson? Do you have the right security set up (e.g. CCTV cameras, security lighting) to deter vandals?
- **Electrical equipment** - have you unplugged all non-essential electrics to reduce the risk of an electrical ignition?
- **Escape routes** - when you locked your premises down, are you sure you didn't affect any escape routes that may still be in use by businesses that have remained open?
- **Fire safety measures** - are you confident that your fire doors, emergency lighting, and fire alarms were all in good working order and properly maintained before you shut up shop? When did you last have them tested?
- **Portable appliance testing** - when was your portable electrical equipment last checked? Will the test run out during the time you're shut? Can you arrange for this to be done as soon as possible before reopening?



Fire safety for businesses that have stayed open during COVID-19

If your business has managed to stay open and operating, you may think that your usual fire risk assessment will still apply, and your fire safety measures will suffice.

However, there are likely to have been some changes to how you do business – an increase in demand or extra stock, for example – that will have a direct impact on your current fire safety measures.

- **Redo your fire risk assessment** - fire safety starts with a robust fire risk assessment. Whenever there is a change to how you work, you have to reevaluate and review your most recent fire risk assessment.
- **Initial considerations** - do you have fewer staff present due to being furloughed or made redundant? Are your fire marshalls still present or do you need to appoint and train new ones? Do you have more stock on the premises? Could this present an ignition risk? Does it block escape routes?
- **New staff** - if you've seen a surge in demand and you've hired new or temporary staff, are you confident you've trained them properly in fire safety procedures? Have you updated your fire risk assessment to reflect your new team members?
- **Temporary building alterations** - you may be tempted to wedge open fire doors to avoid touching handles and push plates for the sake of hygiene, but it's important to remember that fire doors must close fully to create an airtight seal.



Vulnerable workers and fire safety

If you have disabled staff, then you will need to create a Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan (PEEP) with their input and involvement. However, the business impact of COVID-19 may well affect these plans. Start by considering the following:

- **Available staff** - for a PEEP to work properly, you need the right staff to assist in the event of an evacuation. Are the trained staff still in business? Or will you have to appoint new people to take over?
- **Equipment** - do you need to install or replace any necessary equipment to assist in evacuating a vulnerable person?
- **Input** - have you created the PEEP in conjunction with the person affected? Have they signed off on how effective the plan is?

If you would like more information about the above, please contact Marsh Commercial Risk Management to speak to one of our fire risk assessors who will be happy to advise you on your fire safety requirements.

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