

The Fire Risk Assessment is the cornerstone of your fire safety strategy onsite. that's why it is essential that it is done correctly and kept up to date

Did you know that almost anyone (right down to the postman in some cases) has a right to request to see your fire risk assessment when they visit your facility? That's because it is the document that summarises all of the key points of fire safety risk, prevention and strategy onsite. If you have a fire (or if the fire officer comes to call), it's likely to be the first document that the fire service will ask to see when they arrive onsite, to give them an immediate summary of the risks and control measure present on your facility.

Every organisation needs a fire risk assessment. If you have less than 5 employees' onsite, it doesn't need to be a written document – however, if it's not written you may have difficulty proving that it was ever completed if something ever goes wrong, and this could leave you open to legal disputes.

Over the past 3 issues of our 10-part guide we've covered the key facets of fire ignition and fire awareness, looking at some of the key fire risks found in the workplace. We've also looked at identifying exactly who is responsible for the fire safety onsite – now it's time to tackle the all-important Fire Risk Assessment.

If you're concerned that there's still lots of gaps in your fire safety strategy onsite, don't worry! Over the coming few weeks we'll cover everything from designing your Fire Action Plan through to completing all the statutory checks on your fire safety equipment onsite. However, the Fire Risk Assessment is one of the first fire safety measures you should conduct and will act as an action plan for any further steps you may need to take.

Who should do the FRA?

Whoever does the FRA, it should be done in cooperation with the responsible person onsite. The responsible person has their finger on the pulse of all fire safety activity and strategy, so is an essential partner when it comes to compiling the Fire Risk Assessment.

I'm the responsible person - can I do it myself?

Yes, absolutely. However, as with all fire safety activity you must be able to prove that you are sufficiently 'Competent' to perform your activities. As discussed in the last issue, competence is loosely defined in the Regulatory Reform Order (2005) as:

'someone with enough training and experience or knowledge and other qualities to be able to complete their duties properly'.

So how do you know whether you're competent? It really comes back to the complexities of your requirements and your own confidence in whether you've got the ability to do your own assessment. A large part of basic fire safety and your risk assessment is common sense and logical documentation. However, the level of competence required for doing the fire risk assessment at a small florist will be substantially different from doing a fire risk assessment at a petrochemicals facility. Just as importantly, can you prove that you are 'competent'?

There are some very helpful guides provided by the government which will help you complete your own fire risk assessment. However, make sure you're got some time set aside for 140 pages of reading!

You can access these guides and choose the ones that are best for your requirements here - <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/fire-safety-law-and-guidance-documents-for-business/>

Essex FRS have a risk assessment template on their website which you can download and complete, as do the Fire Protection association. we would recommend using one of these as your templates.

Should I appoint a third party, specialist Risk Assessor?

Many companies prefer this route. It lifts much of the burden of responsibility for the assessment from their shoulders and means that they know that it is done correctly – rather than becoming another item in your already time starved schedule. There are also obvious benefits in having a new set of eyes doing the assessment, as they may notice points that someone familiar with your facility would consider commonplace.

It also gives you assurance that it has been carried out accurately by an experienced professional from the start. Remember, the data entered in this document is going to directly influence almost every area of your fire safety strategy now and in the future - that's a big responsibility!

This document will provide you with a template that you can easily review yourself as required on an annual basis, rather than having it professionally each year. In the main, things will stay the same, but simple changes to the layout of a warehouse or offices, or the introduction of a new piece of machinery may require changes to made.

How often should I do a FRA?

The Fire Risk Assessment should be reviewed annually. In this review you should ensure that the issues raised in previous assessments have been addressed, have not reoccurred and that no further issues have arisen.

However, if there has been any substantial changes which could affect the circumstances upon which the assessment was based (e.g. change of use of the building/ a major shift in business operations) or building works etc that could affect escape routes, it should be reviewed sooner. It should also be reviewed if you have a fire.

Remember that the fire risk assessment is always an ongoing document. Although you should officially review it annually, you should stay vigilant and proactive at all times to minimise the risk of fire onsite. If you spot any deficiency, remember to record it and create an action plan to resolve or minimise the issue.

Will this Fire Training Series give me the knowledge to consider myself a 'competent' person and do my own risk assessments?

No, although what you learn will certainly help you. The primary objective of this course to help you ensure you are fulfilling all of your fire safety obligations onsite, and that there isn't any loopholes in your fire safety strategy. This will help you make the facilities for which you are responsible a safer place to work, learn or live (as appropriate)!

The fire risk assessment is a complex area in itself and there isn't time to cover it in this course in the detail it requires – particularly due to the bespoke nature of each facility. There is already a lot of good resources that you can draw from, particularly those on the .gov website referenced above. Visit the following pages for more information.

The template on the following pages will get you started with your risk assessment if you wish to do it yourself. Alternatively, get in touch today for a free quotation for a risk assessment by one of our experienced assessors.

The 5-Step Process of the Fire Risk Assessment

The basic foundations of any fire risk assessment is the same -

(1) Identify Fire Hazards in your premises:

- You'll find issues 1 & 2 of this series invaluable for identifying the key fire risks at your facility.

(2) Identify People at Risk

- This is particularly important if you have disabled, young or vulnerable people onsite who may be less able to respond themselves in the event of a fire.
- Don't forget about visitors! How will you ensure that visitors/contractors are kept safe whilst onsite and are able to safely evacuate in the event of a fire.

(3) Evaluate and take preventative action to reduce or remove risk.

- Think about your findings. Where you have high levels of risk you need to take proactive measures to reduce or eliminate those risks. For Example:
 - If you have flammable liquids/materials stored loose onsite, can they be compartmentalised from other areas of the building or stored in a fireproof cabinet?
- Develop Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans (PEEP's) for disabled people onsite.
- You can't always implement all your changes at once. Document the issues identifies and analyse the likelihood of them happening vs the potential impact of such an event.
- Prioritise the highest risk items first, and create an action plan for the implementation of all the actions over the next few weeks.

(4) Record yours Findings/Actions and communicate your new/updated fire strategy with all relevant personnel.

- If you've identified action points and addressed them or created a schedule to tackle the issues, make sure you've got the audit trail as proof of your activities.
- Create your fire action plan and communicate it with all staff.
- Fire Drills – keep these up to date (we recommend at least 6-monthly) and review each drill for ways to improve. Record these as part of the FRA where relevant.
- Training – do you need to provide training for your staff (particularly the designated Fire Marshals to enable them to fulfil their role).
Do you work in a shared building? Make sure you communicate your plan with them and ensure they have similar measures in place.
Put measures in place to ensure that all of your fire safety compliance is kept up to date so you don't accidentally let compliance and safety slip.

(5) Review, Review, Review

- Your fire risk assessment is an active document. Review it at least 12 monthly, or more frequently if you've done building works or had any major change in operations or storage types/levels.
- Put a system in place with a fire log book to ensure your maintenance / compliance testing routines are kept up to date and recorded as proof of compliance.

Action Points for Issue 4

Print and complete the following form, which is a reference list for the key facets of fire safety compliance that you need to be meeting. These essential documents will form part of your fire risk assessment and ongoing compliance file – the content in this course will assist you in creating and implementing these documents.

In the coming weeks, we'll cover:

- Creating your Fire Emergency Evacuation Plan
- Your overall Fire Action Plan
- Fire Drills/Training
- Weekly/Monthly testing of your fire equipment

If you don't already have a fire risk assessment, you need to prioritise either doing it yourself or getting a professional to do it for you if you don't have the time, competence or confidence. If you already have an assessment, spend a few minutes reviewing it to ensure that it hasn't lapsed past the recommended 12 month renewal period or that the facts and circumstances upon which the assessment were based haven't materially changed.

If your assessment needs to be carefully reviewed again, this can either be done by yourself, using the old document as a template or by getting a new assessment professionally done. If you do it yourself, make sure you record this action and any findings somewhere (sometimes the old assessment will have space for making notes) as proof of the action taking place.

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Disclaimer

This document is intended as a general guidance and is not a substitute for detailed advice that takes into account your own specific circumstances.

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