



Fire safety in retail premises – BRE Global provides some essential information for retail managers

Introduction

It is vitally important that retailers do everything possible to protect their colleagues, customers and premises from the many fire risks faced by their business on a daily basis. A fire safety management system can significantly reduce these risks and minimise the potential effects of fire.

In order to draw up an effective fire management strategy, the Responsible Person (working with colleagues) should have a good understanding of the conditions that can lead to a fire, the materials that are likely to be involved and the consequences should a fire occur. As well as reducing the chances of having a fire, this means that in the event of a fire, well understood and rehearsed responses can be implemented to deal with it effectively.

Fire safety management need not be complicated. For small premises, fire safety could be attempted by a non-fire expert if they felt confident and had sufficient training. However, for large stores and shopping centres, someone with experience in fire safety is advisable. As managers, your main aims should be creating 'fire awareness' and making fire safety management a part of staff's normal duties so that it becomes familiar and routine. As the Responsible Person it would also be a good practice to appoint a deputy or deputies to assume this role in case of absence.

Managers are expected to make sure that fire safety tasks are carried out either by themselves or by a competent and knowledgeable member of staff. A checklist and a fire safety log book to record details of the fire safety tasks completed should also be established as a way of ensuring that tasks are carried out when they are supposed to be.

Fire risk assessment

The Responsible Person must carry out, or appoint a suitable person to carry out, a fire risk assessment of the risks of fire to their employees and others who may be affected by their work or business.

A fire risk assessment is an evaluation of the current fire safety provisions in your premises and is the foundation for your fire safety measures. It is used as a tool to help identify issues that require attention, and help plan ahead to protect staff and business. A fire risk assessment:

- Identifies possible fire hazards.
- Identifies people at risk.
- Reduces risks from these hazards to an acceptable level.
- Identifies what action you need to take to ensure the safety of people on the premises if a fire does break out.

The assessment must also be regularly reviewed and revised where necessary.

In larger premises, fire hazards are likely to be more varied and complicated, requiring specialist knowledge to produce a fire risk assessment in the overall context of the building. Special assistance and advice can be sought from a competent person when preparing an assessment. This can be sought from an independent organisation such as BRE Global, whose experts on fire safety matters can be consulted on fire risk assessments and fire safety audits (see '**Fire safety training and how BRE Global can help**' for more information).

It must be noted that the Responsible Person has the legal duty of ensuring that the appropriate fire risk assessment is undertaken, continuously reviewed and updated if necessary.

Documenting findings and protecting from remaining risks

If you have five or more employees, your premises are licensed or an alterations notice is in force, your fire risk assessment must be documented. The main findings of the assessment should be recorded, an emergency plan should be written and staff should be informed. Staff should also be trained where appropriate.

As the assessment is carried out, remember that (amongst other things):

- Extinguishers should be placed so that they can be found and used quickly.

- Any fire alarm buttons should be prominently placed and the alarm signals should be clearly audible (and perhaps visible) in all parts of the building.
- Fire doors shouldn't be held open (unless by automatic release mechanisms) nor should they be blocked.
- The instructions for evacuation should be clearly visible and simple.

Ways of reducing the risks and protecting from the remaining risks include:

- Informing staff and customers of the fire safety measures and emergency plan.
- Maintenance of the fire precautions.
- Installation of fire detection and warning systems.
- Provision of means of fighting fire (for those trained to do so).
- Provision of escape routes.

Fire safety management

Although important, the fire risk assessment is only one element of a fire safety management plan. For fire safety management to be successful, it needs to be implemented on a daily basis and requires basic understanding of fire and the features in the retail premises that prevent fire spread.

In addition, you must be aware of what fire protection equipment has been installed and how this functions, how it should be maintained and, in the case of automatic fire detection, how this can alert you, your staff and customers to a fire situation.

Fire safety training and how BRE Global can help

All staff, including casual, temporary and volunteer members should work with management and recognise that fire safety awareness is an integral part of their daily duties. The training of staff should make sure that they understand what they need to do to minimise the risk of fire, and what to do if a fire occurs.

Through BRE training we can:

- Train the Responsible Person to carry out fire risk assessments.
- Deliver fire risk assessor courses to staff.
- Train consultants to become fire risk assessors.

The publication 'Fire Safety and Security in Retail Premises', which includes a full list of fire safety tasks and more information on fire risk assessments is available through IHS BRE press from: www.brebookshop.com.

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