

Facilities Management from A to Z

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vacuation

The evacuation of a building may be required in the event of fire or other emergency and plans should be developed and tested following an appropriate risk assessment.

In most premises, the evacuation in case of fire will simply be by means of everyone reacting to the warning signal given when a fire is discovered, then making their way, by the means of escape, to a place of safety away from the premises. This is known as a simultaneous evacuation and will normally be initiated by the sounding of the general alarm over the fire warning system.

In some larger complex premises, the emergency arrangements are designed to allow people who are not at immediate risk from a fire to delay starting their evacuation. It may be appropriate to start the evacuation by initially evacuating only the area closest to the fire and warning other people to stand by.

This is normally done by immediately evacuating the floor where the fire is located and the floor above. The other floors are then evacuated one by one to avoid congestion on the escape routes. The rest of the people are then evacuated if it is necessary to do so. The fire warning system should be capable of giving two distinctly different signals (warning and evacuation) or give appropriate voice messages.

In hospitals, and care homes the floor may be divided into a number of fire resisting compartments and the occupants are moved from the compartment involved in fire to the adjacent compartment and if necessary moved again. Depending onto the fire situation it may eventually be necessary to consider vertical evacuation.

In some cases, such as cinemas and theatres, it may not be appropriate for a general alarm to start immediate evacuation. This could be because of the number of members of the public present and the need for the staff to put pre-arranged plans for the safe evacuation of the premises into action.

In such circumstances a staff alarm can be given by personal pagers, discreet sounders or a coded phrase on a public address system. Following the staff alarm, a more general alarm signal can be given and a simultaneous or phased evacuation started. The general alarm may be activated automatically if manual initiation has not taken place within a pre-determined time.

Guidance documents on fire safety law and evacuation procedures are available for download from the Communities and Local Government website:

www.communities.gov.uk/fire/firesafety/firesafetylaw