

Facilities Management from A to Z



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M Means of Escape

The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 was introduced in 2006 replacing most fire safety legislation with one simple framework. Under the Order any person who has some level of control in premises, frequently the facility manager, must take reasonable steps to reduce the risk from fire and make sure there are the means for people to safely escape in the event of a fire.

The order applies to virtually all premises and covers nearly every type of building, structure and open space including offices, shops, care homes, hospitals, schools, factories and warehouses but not people's private homes. The nature of the premises, its users and occupants, and the activities that take place there all affect the level of risk and therefore the action that must be taken to address it.

The responsible person, either on their own or with any other responsible person, must as far as is reasonably practical make sure that everyone on the premises, or nearby, can escape safely if there is a fire. This is different from previous legislation in that the review must consider everyone who might be on the premises, whether they are employees, visitors or members of the public.

As part of the risk assessment process the facility manager must especially consider anyone that may be at higher risk than others such as people with a disability and to create a plan for dealing with an emergency including the provision of adequate means of escape from the premises should an evacuation be required.

The ideal situation is when there is more than one escape route from all parts of the premises, although this is not always possible. If only one route is available, it may need additional protection or to have an automatic fire-detection system installed. Any proposed building works should be discussed with the local building control officer.

The distance people need to go to escape should be as short as possible. The travel distance and time should be measured from the farthest point in a room to the door of a protected stairway or, if there is no protected stairway, to the final exit from the building.

Stairways, corridors and areas near the fire exits should be kept clear of obstructions and material which can catch fire, and the escape route should lead to a final exit and a safe place. The findings of the risk assessment must be recorded and reviewed as and when necessary.

Comprehensive guidance on all aspects of fire safety and guidance notes on planning means of escape for high risk groups are available from the Health and Safety Executive at www.hse.gov.uk