Fire and other Emergencies

1. Principle?

Organisations should focus on identifying fire risk and putting in controls to prevent it. They should also ensure that there are adequate means for warning there is a fire and means of escape.

2. How does this affect your organisation?

You should have fire risk assessments localised for each building. These assessments should identify the potential sources of fire with notes explaining local conditions and differences. This should then support the design of the fire evacuation procedures and which fire fighting equipment and fire suppressant systems are to be provided and installed. It should also give consideration to ongoing management of the fire precaution and prevention arrangements.

3. Who has to do what?

Fire remains one of the most significant hazards for any organisation. It has a devastating effect on organisations and on injured people. Organisations should keep a check on where fires may start. Such places are where flammable material may be found near heat sources and where there will be sufficient oxygen. Heat sources include ovens, lights, electric motors, electric cables and sockets, naked flames.

When fire sources have been identified organisations should consider reducing the amount of flammable material near heat sources (and escape routes) as far as is reasonable. They should consider the location of fire alarms, sprinkler systems, escape routes and fire exits. Alarm systems and fire suppressant systems need to be tested and well maintained. A different fire alarm should be tested each time and on rotation to provide confidence that they all work. Fire exit routes and doors should be checked daily to ensure that they have not been obstructed.

In some cases, if the organisation is in a remote location away from public services, consideration as to whether to form, equip and train a group of employees as the fire response team may be necessary. Anyone who is expected to use a fire extinguisher or other equipment should be trained in what type of extinguisher to use on what fire, and how best to aim it. Consider if the remote location is justified?
New employees and unescorted visitors or contractors should be instructed what the fire alarm sounds like and what to do if they hear it. Evacuation drills should be regularly practiced to ensure that everyone knows what to do and where to go.

4. What training is required?

Fire evacuation procedures. How to use a fire extinguisher or other fire fighting equipment.

5. What documents and records do you have to keep?

Fire assessments of each building. Fire evacuation logs. Fire suppressant system maintenance records. Fire alarm test records.

6. Where do you go for more information?

www.hse.gov.uk/toolbox/fire

7. What else might you have to consider?

Fire evacuation procedures can be used for other emergencies too e.g. security threat, gas release.

Consideration should be given to business continuity in the event of a major fire.

If employees with significant hearing loss or is deaf is employed, then they may not hear the alarm. A method of instructing them to leave the building must be devised e.g. being told by a fire warden or colleague, or to be warned by a flashing light at their workstation. Similarly plans will have to be drawn up about how disabled workers will be assisted from the building.

Any building work being considered must include a fire plan. Often construction activities introduce new flammable materials and new heat sources as well as altering fire compartmentalisation and the fire retention properties of infrastructure.

Good electrical maintenance of the building installation and equipment.

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