

# SATRA

## UK fire safety law for non-domestic buildings

For non-domestic buildings, fire safety is the responsibility of the building's owner or occupier. The focus is on risk assessment and taking all possible preventative measures.



As part of the UK Government's commitment to reduce death, injury and damage caused by fire, the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) reviewed fire safety law and made a number of changes in 2005 which were designed to make the law easier to understand and comply with. These changes form the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (RRFSO) and apply to non-domestic premises only. The RRFSO was approved by Parliament on 7th June 2005, became law in the UK on 1st October 2006 and was subsequently modified by the Fire Safety Act 2021, the Fire Safety (England) Regulations 2022, and Section 156 of the Building Safety Act 2022.

The main effect of the law is to increase the emphasis on fire prevention in all non-domestic premises, including the voluntary sector and also premises separate from dwellings used by the self-employed. Some examples of premises falling within the scope of the Order are: offices, shops, shopping malls, hotels, guest houses, nursing homes, village halls, bingo halls, casinos, cinemas, theatres, churches, factories, offices, warehouses, schools, residential schools, universities, prisons, hostels for students or nurses, barracks for military persons, hospitals, railway stations, bus stations and football grounds. Fire certificates have been abolished and ceased to have legal status.

The RRFSO applies in England and Wales. (Northern Ireland and Scotland have their own laws.) It covers 'general fire precautions' and other fire safety duties which are needed to protect 'relevant persons' (for instance, employees or occupiers) in case of fire in and around most 'premises'. The risk assessment guide states: 'The Order requires fire precautions to be put in place *where necessary* and to the extent that it is reasonable and practicable in the circumstances of the case'.

## Responsible person

Responsibility for complying with the Fire Safety Order rests with the 'responsible person'. In a workplace, this is the employer and any other person who may have control of any part of the premises – for example, the occupier or owner. In all other premises, the person or people in control of the premises will be responsible. If there is more than one responsible person in any type of premises, they must all take all reasonable steps to work with each other.

The nominated responsible person must carry out a fire risk assessment which needs to focus on the safety in case of fire of all 'relevant persons'. This assessment should pay particular attention to those at special risk, such as the disabled and those with special needs, and must include consideration of any dangerous substance likely to be on the premises. The fire risk assessment will help to identify those risks that can be removed or reduced and to decide on the nature and extent of the general fire precautions that need to be put in place to protect people against the fire risks that remain.

If five or more persons are employed, the responsible person must record the significant findings of the assessment.

A set of documents (see box 1) has been produced by the UK Government to help people to meet their obligations under the RRFSO in order to assist those preparing fire risk assessments. These give detailed information on carrying out the assessment and other issues including guidance on reducing the risk of fires, building construction, fire precautions, good practice for storage of flammable materials and improving means of escape.



*The risk assessment checks fire doors, fire-fighting equipment and signage*

These documents are not prescriptive, leaving the 'responsible person' to decide what level of fire resistance to ask for when purchasing furniture, furnishings, beds, mattresses, floor coverings and curtains. Clearly, with a high level of responsibility placed upon the operator of the building, he or she will have to consult widely and then decide on the appropriate level of fire safety when purchasing items. The guides do mention some safety standards, but they are not specific about what might be acceptable.

Purchasers of furniture and furnishings should ensure that all products and materials obtained are supplied with a current and valid test certificate. If there are doubts about the validity of test results, additional tests should be conducted as a form of due diligence.

## Box 1: Regulatory Reform Order fire safety risk assessment documents

1. Fire safety: guidance for the hospitality industry
2. Fire safety risk assessment: animal premises and stables
3. Fire safety risk assessment: means of escape for disabled people
4. Fire safety risk assessment: open-air events and venues
5. Fire safety risk assessment: transport premises and facilities
6. Fire safety risk assessment: healthcare premises
7. Fire safety risk assessment: residential care premises
8. Fire safety risk assessment: theatres, cinemas and similar premises
9. Making your premises safe from fire
10. Fire safety risk assessment: five-step checklist
11. Fire safety risk assessment: factories and warehouses
12. Fire safety risk assessment: large places of assembly
13. Fire safety risk assessment: small and medium places of assembly
14. Fire safety risk assessment: educational premises
15. Fire safety risk assessment: sleeping accommodation
16. Fire safety risk assessment: offices and shops

## Identifying risk

While SATRA cannot decide what levels of safety might be needed for a specific building or set of premises, it can advise on current UK specifications and associated test methods for furniture and floor covering materials. Risk assessments should be conducted by appropriately skilled persons. Measures to remove or mitigate risks can be actioned and benchmarks for fire resistance of building interiors, equipment, plant, and furniture and floor coverings can be determined. Appropriate products and/or materials may then be identified for testing.

Test certificates from suppliers should be obtained where they can be relied upon as being current and relevant. When such documents are not available, SATRA can provide comprehensive testing facilities – a useful service for those buying products for affected premises. With this information the ‘responsible person’ can build up a dossier or schedule of information which can then be used to demonstrate that he or she has considered the potential risks and has then ensured that items installed meet the appropriate fire resistance in order to minimise the risks.

Those selling furniture and floor coverings can also benefit from testing, as certificates will demonstrate compliance to an appropriate fire resistance specification which is deemed to satisfy the perceived risk.

## How can we help?

**15 PER CENT DISCOUNT ON FIRST SATRA TEST** — [please click here](#).

SATRA's UKAS-accredited flammability testing services are available to all and quick turnaround times at competitive prices promote good value for money. Please email [furniture@satra.com](mailto:furniture@satra.com) for further information.

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