

Fire Regulations and Risk Assessment

New fire safety laws came into force on October 1st 2006 making businesses directly responsible for the safety of all premises users. As a result, fire certificates were abolished in favour of risk assessments to be completed by a designated 'responsible person'.

The new laws affect every type of tourism business including self-catering and smaller B&Bs who were previously exempt from requiring a fire certificate on the six beds or less rule.

The Assessment

The fire risk assessment must to be carried out with the focus on the safety of all 'relevant persons' including employees and visitors. The assessment will help identify where risks can be removed or reduced and the precautions needed to protect against those risks. A written record of assessment is required by law and for businesses who want to be part of either the AA or Quality in Tourism's quality assessment schemes.

The assessment can either be carried out in-house or by a fire safety assessor. Smaller establishments or those with an employee confident enough to carry out the assessment themselves should find that compiling the assessment is a fairly simple task.

What does a fire risk assessment involve?

There are 5 key steps in a fire safety risk assessment:

1. Identify fire hazards - e.g., how could a fire start? what could burn?
2. Consider the people who may be a risk - e.g., employees, visitors to the premises, and anyone who may be particularly vulnerable such as children, the elderly and disabled people.
3. Evaluate and act - think about what you have found in steps 1 and 2 and remove and reduce any risks to protect people and premises.
4. Record, plan and train - keep a record of what risks you identified and what actions you have taken to reduce or remove them. Make a clear plan of how to prevent fires and, should a fire start, you will keep people safe. Make sure your staff know what to do in the event of a fire and if necessary that they are trained for their roles.
5. Review - regularly review your risk assessment to ensure it remains up to date and reflects and changes that may have occurred.

Using the government's guides (<http://www.communities.gov.uk/fire/>) in conjunction with the content of a previous fire certificate (if available) will ensure you comply with the new laws. The Fire Protection Association has a free online assessor (<http://www.fpa-fireriskassessment.com/>) that you may also find useful.

Using a Fire Safety Assessor can give you the added peace-of-mind of compliance but will bare additional costs. If you do wish to use an external assessor we recommend you consult the Institution of Fire Engineers' Register of Fire Risk Assessors & Auditors (<http://www.ife.org.uk/frr/>) for assessors in your area.

Compliance

Fire officers are at liberty to carry out spot checks on any business at any time and the fines for noncompliance are hefty. Fire Officers also have a large amount of authority in this area. The only route of appeal is to agree with the Fire Authority to apply to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government for a determination. Otherwise you could be prosecuted by the Authority and you would need to defend your position in court.

The government do not anticipate that any significant improvements to premises will be needed providing fire precautions have been properly maintained with no material alterations to the property or a fire certificate has been issued previously. For smaller premises the Government's

advisory document (Fire Risk Assessment – Sleeping Accommodation) which is available on the Tourism South East website, suggests many ways in which less expensive means can be used to ensure safety and compliance.

It is important that businesses check with insurers that they are adhering to their policies. If fire regulations are deliberately breached, they will avoid making payments.

More Information

_ Government guidance on completing the risk assessment

(<http://www.firesafetylaw.communities.gov.uk/>)

_ Business Link's guide to the fire risk assessment

(<http://www.businesslink.gov.uk/bdotg/action/layer?r.s=sl&topicId=1074253164>)