

Fire Safety & Risk Assessment

cornwall rural
information for
community buildings management committees
resource pack
community council

The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 came into effect as of 1st October 2006. It reformed existing fire safety laws and covers fire precaution and safety duties in non-domestic properties.

Why is it important to you?

Previous to the Fire Safety Order 2005 you may have expected a visit to your village hall by a Fire Officer who would have assessed the fire safety and made any recommendations for improvements. However, since the Fire Safety Order, the village hall management committee is now responsible for carrying out its own fire safety risk assessment and reducing the chance of fire.

The Fire and Rescue Authority are responsible for enforcing the Order and can check premises and audit fire risk assessments.

Not having an adequate fire risk assessment and/or safety precautions could invalidate your public liability insurance.

The emphasis under the new reform is to reduce the risk of fire with the ultimate aim of preventing fire. It is an offence not to comply with the Order.

“Hirers should be instructed of fire procedures and the use of the equipment.”

Key Points

The Management Committee as the responsible party for the Village Hall takes on the role named in the Order as “Responsible Person”. The Responsible Person, i.e. the committee, must appoint one or more “Competent Persons” (who can be committee members) who will undertake a risk assessment and carry out any preventative measures.

There is no requirement for the Competent Person to undertake training, but they should have a good understanding of the building they are assessing and the activities taking place in it; and have to hand information regarding the companies servicing the fire equipment, maintenance schedules, the local fire officer’s contact details, previous advice and the ACRE Information Sheet: Fire Safety in Village Halls.

If assessing a large hall for the first time you may wish to appoint two competent persons. Alternatively, it may be a good idea to engage a professional fire risk assessor. It should cost approximately £100, depending on the size of the hall, for a full assessment and written report to conform to the Order.

Whichever method you choose the appointed competent person then needs to:

- communicate clearly with the rest of the committee (see below)
- ensure that the hall and necessary fire protection equipment is maintained in an efficient state and in good working order and repair by a competent person and in accordance with any manufacturers instructions
- make sure that the whole committee are consulted and informed with regard to fire safety matters (but in particular:)
- provide appropriate instruction in the use of equipment
- ensure the committee are aware of any risks identified and the measures taken to reduce the risk
- ensure the committee are aware of any proposals for improving fire precautions
- the presence of dangerous substances and the risk to users of the premises
- the agreed system for contacting the emergency services and evacuating the building if necessary

- ensure that the committee co-operate with each other to keep the hall safe from fire and its effects and do not do anything that places themselves, other people or the hall at risk.

Hirers should be instructed of fire procedures and the use of the equipment. The Hall Committee have a responsibility to ensure that hirers are aware of these procedures and that they appoint a person to take responsibility at the event. It is good practice to include this in your Hiring Agreement and ensure hirers sign a copy and return it to the committee. If the worst should happen, then the committee can at least show that they carried out their responsibility to the hirer.

“ Not having an adequate fire risk assessment and/or safety precautions could invalidate your public liability insurance. ”

FAQs

Can I do it myself?

Yes. The DCLG believes that those with the responsibility for premises are likely to be best placed to maintain fire safety precautions and understand and address the risk to lives and property that fire represents to those working there or visiting.

Under the Order, the duty to carry out and implement a fire risk assessment lies with the responsible person. Achieving fire safety is often a matter of common sense, and in many cases there may be no need for specialist or formal knowledge or training, providing the responsible makes enough time available to go through all the necessary steps.

In carrying out a risk assessment, however, the responsible person may decide that, given the nature of the premises or the people involved, they do not have the necessary competence to discharge their duties under the Order.

In that case, they could choose to appoint one or more 'competent' persons to assist him/her. The level of necessary competence is not prescribed in the Order, which recognises that the extent of competency will vary according to the nature and complexity of the premises involved.

Further guidance is available at
www.communities.gov.uk/fire

What is a competent person under the Order?

The term 'competent person' is contained within three articles of the Order. These deal with fire fighting and fire detection; procedures for serious and imminent danger and for danger areas; and safety assistance.

In each case the term is explained as referring to a person who '... has sufficient training and experience or knowledge and other qualities ...' to implement the requirements of the article.

How often should I do a risk assessment?

You should keep your fire risk assessment under regular review as risks may change over time.

If you make changes to your premises, you should ensure that the assessment and risk management plan remains current.

Does the fire risk assessment require measures such as fire escapes, fire alarms, fire doors or sprinklers to be in place?

The Order allows the responsible person to decide which prevention and protection measures would be most appropriate in the light of the premises and those who may be on them at any one time.

What happens if I don't comply with the legislation?

Fire and Rescue Authorities will, where necessary, offer support and advice on how best to improve fire safety arrangements. In doing so, they will take account of measures which are proportionate and reasonable to the identified risk.

In cases where a serious risk exists and is not being managed, Fire and Rescue Authorities have a statutory duty to enforce compliance with the Order. In serious cases, penalties of a fine of up to £5,000 for each offence on summary conviction (in a Magistrates Court) or an unlimited fine or up to two years imprisonment, or both on conviction or indictment in a Crown Court or above.

Further information

ACRE information sheet

- ACRE sheet 37 "Fire Safety in Village Halls". Specific Village Hall related information to help you comply with legislative requirements and make your hall a safer public space. Retails at £4 (inc P&P) from CRCC.

Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG)

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/fire/firesafety/firesafetylaw/>. The full guide and summary versions of "Fire Safety Risk Assessment - Small and Medium Places of Assembly" (relevant to village halls) are also available on this site.

'Fire Safety in Village Halls and

Community Centres' published by the Fire Protection Association, ISBN 0 902167 52-9 at a cost of £5.00 plus VAT. www.thefpa.co.uk or telephone 01608 812500.

“ Fire and Rescue Authorities will, where necessary, offer support and advice on how best to improve fire safety arrangements. ”

FOR A LARGE PRINT VERSION PLEASE CONTACT US



Write to: Jon Teague, Community Buildings Officer, CRCC, 2 Princes Street, Truro, Cornwall, TR1 2ES

Tel: 01872 243551 **Email:** jon.teague@cornwallrcc.co.uk

www.cornwallrcc.co.uk/community_buildings.html

Cornwall Rural Community Council (registered as Cornwall Community Development Ltd.) Charity no: 1087550, Company no: 4144745, VAT no: 557448996

Cornwall Rural Community Council
Konsel Kemmynieth a'n Pow Kernow