

Fire risk assessments in schools

Health and safety responsibilities derive from the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and associated regulations. Health and safety legislation is enforced by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE).

Employer

The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 places overall responsibility for health and safety with the employer. Who this is varies with the type of school.

- For community schools, community special schools, voluntary controlled schools, maintained nursery schools and pupil referral units the employer is the local authority (LA).
- For foundation schools, foundation special schools and voluntary-aided schools, the employer is usually the governing body.
- For independent schools, the employer is usually the governing body or proprietor.

Education employers have duties to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable:

- the health, safety and welfare of teachers and other education staff
- the health and safety of pupils in-school and on off-site visits
- the health and safety of visitors to schools, and volunteers involved in any school activity.

Employees

Employees have responsibilities too. The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 apply to them as well.

Employees must:

- take reasonable care of their own and others health and safety
- cooperate with their employers
- carry out activities in accordance with training and instructions
- inform the employer of any serious risks.

Enforcement

The Health and Safety Executive enforces health and safety law relating to the activities of LAs and schools.

Because the employer is responsible for health and safety in the workplace and on work activities the HSE will normally take action against the employer. However, in some circumstances, for example where an employee failed to take notice of the employers policy or directions in respect of health and safety, the HSE may take action against the employee as well or instead.

Responsibility All Schools

The employer must have a health and safety policy and arrangements to implement it and the policy should include:

- A general statement of policy
- Delegation of duties as allocated tasks
- Arrangements made to put in place, monitor and review measures necessary to reach satisfactory health and safety standards
- Training of staff in health and safety including competence in risk assessment
- Off-site visits including school-led adventure activities
- Selecting and controlling contractors
- First-Aid and supporting pupils' medical needs
- School Security
- Occupational health services and work-related stress
- Consultation arrangements with employees
- Workplace safety for teachers, pupils and visitors
- Violence to staff
- Manual handling
- Slips and trips
- On site vehicle movements
- Management of asbestos
- Control of hazardous substances
- Maintenance and when necessary examination and test of plant and equipment such as electrical equipment, local exhaust ventilation, pressure systems, gas appliances, lifting equipment and glazing safety.
- Recording and reporting accidents to staff, pupils and visitors - including those reportable under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1995 (RIDDOR).
- Fire safety, including testing of alarms and evacuation procedures
- Dealing with health and safety emergencies - procedures and contacts

Employers must assess the risks of all activities, introduce measures to manage those risks, and tell their employees about the measures.

In practice, employers may delegate specific health and safety tasks to individuals (LAs may delegate specific tasks to schools). But the employer retains the ultimate responsibility no matter who carries out the tasks.

The legislation requires all employers to assess the risks of fire and demonstrate that steps have been taken to minimise these risks. Places of work with more than five staff must keep a written record of the results of the assessment.

The individual or corporate body responsible for the premises is required to ensure the potential risk of fire and its likely consequences are properly assessed, and take appropriate measures to reduce or eliminate such risks.

Whilst most fire risk assessments usually include the obvious fire hazards and safety equipment such as fire doors, escape stairways and extinguishers, you should also look at hazards that are specific to certain parts of the school such as catering facilities, science labs, facilities for cooking lessons and so on.

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