



FIRE SAFETY: FIRE RISK MANAGEMENT

In the wake of some prominent multi-fatality fires, organisations have spent considerable sums of money on fire safety but not necessarily achieved an improved level of fire safety assurance. Having spent a number of years undertaking Fire Safety Audits on a variety of buildings, it is noticeable that some organisations are beginning to wonder if the current practice is sustainable.

It's been almost nine years since the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 prompted many organisations to undertake Fire Risk Assessments within the premises under their control and many organisations have spent significant financial resources on 'consultant' Fire Risk Assessors only to discover that the advice they received may have been offered with the best of intentions but was not wholly appropriate and may have differed from the advice of a 'competent' Fire Risk Assessor.

At the same time the fire industry has spent a considerable amount of time in the last few years deciding how to define a 'suitable and sufficient' Fire Risk Assessment (as per one of my previous articles) and deciding how to tackle the 'cowboy' market.

It would appear that, at long last, there is now at least a 'defined' competency criterion for Fire Risk Assessors and guidance for those charged with delivering Fire Risk Assessment programmes on how to seek out the services of a competent Fire Risk Assessor.

Following a recent review of Enforcement of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005, undertaken by the Department of Business Innovation and Skills, the Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA) is now committed to promoting the use, and acceptance, of recognised professional certification and accreditation for commercial Fire Risk Assessors.

Fire Risk Assessments are the cornerstone of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order yet the value of a Fire Risk Assessment, even when undertaken by a competent Fire Risk Assessor, is largely dependent on the organisation's ability to manage the outcomes. A Fire Risk Assessment is a means to an end but not the end in itself.

When reviewing the high profile prosecutions that have hit the headlines over the past few years, one quickly realises that failure to undertake a 'suitable and sufficient' Fire Risk Assessment (under Article 9) is not the only compliance obligation imposed by the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005; there are numerous other duties by which the responsible person is bound.

Enter the concept of 'fire risk management'. With very few fire fatalities arising in commercial premises, fire risk management is not just about life safety or the risk of injury or death in the event of fire occurrence, it encapsulates life safety, property protection, mission continuity and sustainability in the face of fire.

In today's global and interconnected market place issues such as corporate social responsibility and reputational risk are very prominent and news headlines travel fast via both traditional and new media forms. The cost of fire is at an all-time high and in these tough economic times organisations



need to be frugal with finite financial resources. They need to build resilience and ensure that Fire Risk Assessment programmes deliver the intended outcomes.

Many organisations have a policy in place setting out an overarching statement of intent (signed by the CEO) and firmly establishing the 'what and why'. Less common yet essential is the Fire Risk Management Strategy; a document which defines an organisation's Fire Risk Management System and method of implementing the overarching policy and which firmly establishes the details of 'how, when and who'. These two pieces of documentation form the backbone of an organisation's Fire Risk Management System (a set of interrelated or interacting elements of an organisation to establish policies and objectives and processes to achieve those objectives and manage fire risk) and are generally underpinned by operational procedures.

The practice of fire risk management within our built environment is a much broader discipline than many give it credit for. When undertaking Fire Risk Management System Audits, my experience is that those organisations that recognise fire risk management as a discipline in its own right, regardless of which department the function sits, are in a far better position to maintain governance over organisational fire risk than those that do not.

PAS 7 presents requirements for an organisation's Fire Risk Management System that documents a policy that is translated into action to ensure that the risk to people and the business are reduced as far as reasonably practicable, whilst ensuring that the legislative requirements are met. British Standards have recognised the benefits of PAS 7 and have now started the formal process of making the PAS7 into a BS.

Some organisations have formalised their fire safety policy, strategy and procedures and are now in the process of gaining Fire Risk Management System certification via a third party certification body. Those organisations that already hold certification of their Health and Safety Management System to OHSAS 18001, or Business Continuity Management System to ISO 22301, are well placed to integrate their management systems and streamline the internal or external audit process.

Fire risk management is evolving both as a discipline and a practice as an integrated or holistic approach to understanding and managing the risks posed by the threat of fire which enables an organisation to optimise its underlying processes and achieve more efficient results.