

Independent Guide

Fire Strategy – what is it and do I need one?



Independent workplace compliance

Introduction

After the devastating Grenfell fire disaster and the on-going enquiry, it has become apparent that some of the UK building stock is below standard. The level of documentation now being reviewed by enforcement bodies during inspections or investigations, should anything go wrong, has increased, and evolved from this enquiry.

The fire safety industry now has a focus on fire strategy documents forming an essential basis on which to conduct the fire risk assessment. This will allow the 'responsible person' to plan, manage and co-ordinate the appropriate fire safety precautions to minimise the risk of fire and ensure the safety of occupants. It also helps the fire risk assessor to establish any differences in the way the building is used, or how it has been adapted, compared to what is stated in the fire strategy which could impact upon life safety.

What is a fire strategy?

A fire strategy is a technical document that sets the basis for fire safety control measures from the design of a building – it is not a fire safety plan, or an evacuation plan/procedure. It is required to demonstrate compliance with Building Regulations, covering:

- Means of fire detection
- Warning and escape
- Internal fire spread (linings and structure)
- External fire spread
- Accessibility and facilities provided for the fire service.

Typically, a fire strategy will be produced at the design stage of a building in conjunction with architectural plans and is required as part of a building control submission. The document will also provide details of occupancy levels permitted within the building against the provision of horizontal and vertical means of escape and levels of compartmentation.

The requirement for a fire strategy is not only applicable to new builds; they can also be produced for existing buildings. These are often known as 'retrospective fire strategies'. **As mentioned above, a fire strategy document forms an essential basis on which to conduct the fire risk assessment and It is important to note that a fire risk assessment cannot deviate from the fire strategy.**

Who can create a fire strategy?

Unfortunately, as fire strategies can only be produced by qualified and competent fire engineers, Assurity Consulting are unable to produce these. Further detail can be found on The Institute of Fire Engineers (IFE) website under 'find a UK fire engineer' directory.

What to do next?

1. Locate your building's fire strategy (whether you are a tenant, sole occupier, or managing agent)
2. If you cannot locate an existing fire strategy, commission a 'retrospective fire strategy'
3. Confirm it resembles the building's current use and construction and act upon this if it does not
4. Keep the fire strategy document under review
5. Make this document available to your fire risk assessors

Having a 'suitable and sufficient' fire risk assessment for the properties you own, manage, or occupy, whereby the risk assessor has had visibility of the fire strategy to formulate their significant findings is fundamental in managing fire safety. Don't forget to keep the fire strategy under review, so it reflects the buildings current use, fire safety features and construction. This will assist the responsible person in demonstrating their duties as outlined in The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (RRFSO).

This guide is of a general nature; specific advice can be obtained from Assurity Consulting. Assurity Consulting is the UK's leading independent compliance consultancy specialising in workplace health, safety and environmental solutions. We have over 35 years' experience of helping customers of all sizes, from across all sectors, manage their compliance responsibilities, making sure that their organisation is compliant, their employees are safe, their processes are cost effective and their management team is in control.



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