

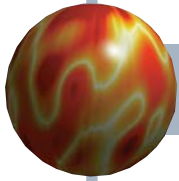
Guidance Notes on Fire Safety at Workplaces



This guidance notes is issued free of charge and can be obtained from offices of the Occupational Safety & Health Branch.

Address and telephone numbers of the offices can be found in website of the Department at <http://www.labour.gov.hk>.

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Occupational Safety and Health Branch
Labour Department

1 PREFACE

This booklet is about fire safety in offices, shops, restaurants and other public places - anywhere people are employed to work.

It is a basic guide for employers or occupiers of workplaces and also for managers, supervisors or employee representatives who need to know about fire precautions at work.

It also gives guidance on fire precautions to be taken to reduce the risk of fire and to ensure everyone employed there knows what action to take if a fire occurs.

This guide does not deal with the special fire risks arising from manufacturing processes or similar activities. Nor does it deal with structural alterations which should come under the Building Ordinance.

The other issues in the workplace will be dealt with separately by some other publications issued by this Branch.



2 MEANS OF ESCAPE

In the event of a fire, a basic requirement for the safety of everyone is that there should be adequate means of escape by which all are able to reach a safe place without becoming overcome by smoke, toxic gases, heat or fire.

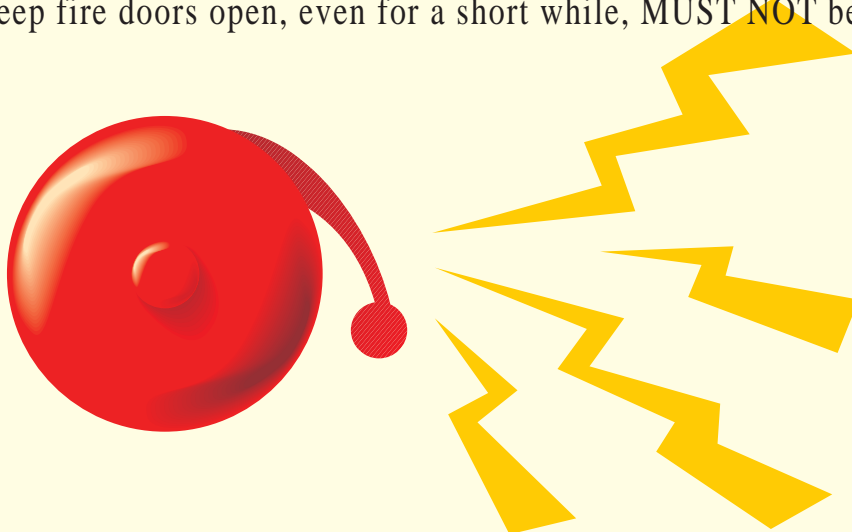
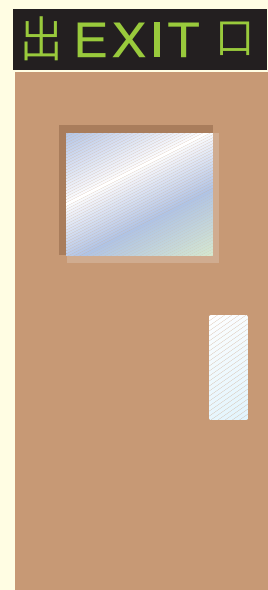
The employer or occupier of the workplace should ensure all means of escape can be safely reached at all times. There should also be an unobstructed means of escape beyond the exits from the workplace to a safe place.

The exit doors should be kept unfastened or unlocked at all times when people are in the building, or otherwise fastened in such a manner that they can easily be opened from inside the workplace without using a key.

At each doorway providing exit from the workplace, there should be a conspicuously placed illuminated sign bearing the word "EXIT" in English and Chinese.

The means of escape should be clearly and accurately illustrated in floor plans. The floor plans should be properly displayed at prominent places in the workplaces, easily viewed by all.

Regular checks should be made on fire doors and all self-closing devices fitted to them to ensure they function correctly. The use of wedges or any other device to keep fire doors open, even for a short while, **MUST NOT** be allowed.



3 FIRE WARNING SYSTEMS

The means for giving warning in case of fire should be given in writing, made known to all employees in the workplace.

An agreed means of alerting people quickly and efficiently, and of summoning the Fire Services Department or the Police Force in case of fire, is a prudent precaution.

In small workplaces, electrical or mechanical fire alarms may not be necessary if adequate warning can be given by word of mouth and all employees are aware of the action to be taken in case of fire.

Whichever fire warning system is used, it should be suitable for the workplace and must be recognised as the fire alarm, and not mistaken for anything else, such as the burglar alarm.

Any fire warning system should be regularly tested, and a record of these tests should be kept.

4 FIRE FIGHTING

It is also important to provide the appropriate types of fire extinguishers to deal with different fire risks, and to ensure that the correct instructions are clearly indicated. Guidance on the provision of fire fighting equipment and their method of operation should be conveyed to all employees in the workplace.

Employees should be aware of the location of the fire extinguishers and know which type of fire extinguisher is appropriate to a particular fire.

All the means for fighting fire in the workplace should be properly maintained in efficient working order and kept readily available for use and free from obstruction.



5 TRAINING OF EMPLOYEES

Adequate and sufficient training in fire safety at workplaces should be provided periodically at suitable intervals to all people working in the premises, and may be supplemented by additional written instructions.

In workplaces where members of the public will be present, training should be given to ensure every employee receives instructions at least once, though preferably twice, in 12 months.

It is particularly important that all newly appointed employees should receive fire safety training immediately before they start work. Managers should ensure those who work on shifts and others who work outside normal hours, such as cleaners, are included in such training.

If an employee's knowledge of Chinese or English is limited, training should be given in a manner they can understand. Non-Cantonese or English speakers and employees who have a poor understanding of written Chinese or English should be taken into account when written instructions are being prepared.

The following subjects should be covered in each training session, with practical exercises where possible : -

- general fire prevention;
- the action to be taken upon discovering a fire;
- the method of raising the alarm;
- the action to be taken upon hearing a fire alarm;
- the correct method of calling the Fire Services Department or the Police Force (by dialing 999);
- the location and use of fire fighting equipment;
- knowledge of means of escape, assembly points and roll call procedure;
- stopping machines and processes and isolating power supplies where appropriate;
- the evacuation procedure for the building, including any special arrangements for disabled employees and the prohibition of using lifts. Where members of the public are present this will include checking the public areas, informing and reassuring the public and directing or escorting them to exits; and
- close all smoke doors at all times.

Details of the training and instructions given should be recorded in a log, which should also detail:

- the date of the instruction or exercise;
- the duration;
- the name of the person giving the instruction;
- the names of the people receiving the instruction; and
- the nature of the instruction, training or drill.



6 FIRE DRILLS IN WORKPLACES WITH FIRE ALARMS

Fire drill should be carried out at least once a year, but at more frequent intervals in large workplaces, where the public is present. Where there are alternative means of escape, the drill should be based on the assumption that one or more of the escape routes cannot be used because of the fire.

The fire drills may raise some difficulties where members of the public are present, but the fire drill should be rehearsed as fully as circumstances allow. Such difficulties can be overcome if drills are carried out when relatively few people are present and advance notice is given.

In many organisations, it is usual to appoint a small group of people, usually supervisors and managers, to observe fire drills, informing them beforehand that the drill is about to take place, where the supposed fire outbreak is and which means of escape is to be obstructed.

Afterwards, the observers should discuss the drill, and any failings they find, with senior management.

7 FIRE DRILLS IN WORKPLACES WITHOUT FIRE ALARMS

In workplaces without fire alarms, it will still be necessary to ensure that the fire warning systems and the fire procedures are fully understood by all staff.

New employees should receive immediate instruction on the action to take in the event of fire, including a walk over all means of escape. At least once in every 12 months, the validity of the agreed procedures should be tested by an evacuation drill.

8 FIRE INSTRUCTION NOTICES

Notices should be displayed in all conspicuous positions in the workplace to highlight the action to be taken on discovering a fire. All fire instruction notices should be framed and glazed or otherwise sealed to prevent loss or defacement and be permanently fixed in position.

The contents of the notices should explain:

- how the fire alarm is to be raised in case of fire;
- how and to whom fires should be reported;
- where the employees should assemble on hearing the alarm;
- that staff should not stop to collect personal belongings;
- that staff should attack the fire with available equipment if it is safe to do so and do not use water on fires of electrical origin;
- that staff do not re-enter the workplace until it is certified safe to do so;
- that all smoke doors are kept closed at all times;
- not to use lifts in case of fire; and
- the means for calling fire services personnel.



9 GOOD HOUSEKEEPING AND PREVENTION OF FIRE

Good housekeeping and sensible fire precautions will reduce the possibility of a fire occurring, otherwise the outbreak of fire becomes more likely and more difficult to stop its spread.

Common fire hazards include:

- the careless disposal of lighted cigarettes or matches;
- the accumulation of rubbish, paper or other materials that can easily catch fire;
- electrical wiring, plugs and sockets kept in poor conditions or overloaded;
- electrical equipment left switched on when not in use (unless designed to be permanently connected);
- flammable material left close to sources of heat;
- obstruction of heater, machinery or office equipment ventilation;
- inadequate cleaning of work areas;
- exits and exit doors being locked up;
- careless handling or over storage of dangerous substances; and
- lack of proper maintenance of fire service installations and equipment.

As lighted cigarettes are one of the main causes of fire, supervisors should ensure that smokers appreciate the need to take care and that, in areas where they are permitted to smoke, they:

- are provided with adequate ashtrays;
- never use waste bins as ashtrays; and
- never empty ashtrays into waste bins even if the contents appear to be extinguished.

Although fire precautions are mainly common sense, employees need to know what to look out for. The following check list may therefore be useful. The content should be adjusted to meet individual needs:

- make sure rubbish, wastepaper or other materials that could catch fire does not accumulate in, or adjacent to, any building;
- make sure that where it is necessary to store flammable materials they are kept in an appropriate place and in appropriate quantities;
- make sure that electrical wiring, plugs and sockets are correctly fused and sound, and that there is no overloading; ensure repairs are carried out by a competent person;
- turn off electrical equipment when not in use (unless it is designed to be permanently connected);
- ensure no material that could readily catch fire is left near a source of heat;
- make sure that machinery and office equipment is well ventilated and regularly cleaned (particularly important in a factory where fluff and dust can gather and mix with grease);
- take care that all work areas are cleaned on a regular basis;
- ensure that the means of escape are kept clear of obstruction at all times;
- close smoke doors at all times; and
- proper maintenance of fire service installations and equipment.

A person should be appointed to conduct regular check in respect of fire safety. Employees should be encouraged to alert their supervisor of any hazard or some other person in authority.

Enquiry Services

Telephone : 2559 2297 (auto-recording after office hours)
Fax : 2915 1410
E-mail : enquiry@labour.gov.hk

Information on the services offered by the Occupational Safety and Health Council can be obtained through hotline 2739 9000.

