

Guidance Notes on Fire Safety at Workplaces

EXIT



**No
Smoking**

FIRE SAFETY



Labour Department



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This Guidance Notes is issued free of charge and can be obtained from offices of the Occupational Safety and Health Branch or downloaded from the Labour Department's website at https://www.labour.gov.hk/eng/public/content2_8.htm. For enquiries on addresses and telephone numbers of the offices, please visit the Labour Department's website at <https://www.labour.gov.hk/eng/tele/osh.htm> or call 2559 2297.

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1 INTRODUCTION

This Guidance Notes concerns the fire safety in workplaces including offices, shops, restaurants, factories and any place where employees are at 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 therein knows what actions to take if a fire occurs.

This Guidance Notes does not deal with the special fire risks arising from industrial processes or similar activities, nor does it cover structural alterations which should come under the Buildings Ordinance, Chapter 123.



2 MEANS OF ESCAPE

Adequate means of escape should be provided within a workplace so as to ensure that all employees are able to reach a safe place without being overcome by smoke, toxic gases, heat or flame in case of fire.

The employer or occupier of the workplace should ensure that 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.

Exit doors should be kept unlocked while employees are in a workplace or otherwise fastened in such a manner that they can easily be opened from inside the workplace without using any unlocking device such as a key or a smart card, etc.

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

The means of escape should be clearly and accurately illustrated in floor plans which should be properly displayed at prominent places in the workplace and easily viewed by all. If there is any hidden exit in the workplace, directional signs should be provided to indicate the means of escape in case of fire.

Fire doors can prevent smoke or fire from spreading. Regular checks should be made on fire doors and their self-closing devices to ensure their proper functioning. All fire doors should be kept closed at all times. The use of wedges or any other devices to keep fire doors open, even for a short while, **MUST NOT** be allowed.



3 FIRE WARNING SYSTEMS



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

It is a prudent precaution to have an agreed means of alerting people quickly and efficiently and of summoning the Fire Services Department and the Hong Kong Police Force in case of fire.

Any fire warning system used must meet the requirements of the relevant fire prevention legislation, and should always be functioning properly and regularly tested and maintained. All inspection and maintenance records should be properly kept.






No matter which fire warning system is used, it should be suitable for the workplace and must be recognised as the fire alarm, not being mistaken for anything else such as the burglar alarm.

In small workplaces, fire alarms may not be necessary if proper verbal warnings are given and can alert all employees to the occurrence of fire and to take necessary actions.

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 its method of operation should be conveyed to all employees in the workplace.

Employees should be aware of the location of fire extinguishers and know which type of fire extinguisher is appropriate for a particular fire. Types of fire extinguishers and their usage are as follows:

Type of fire extinguisher					
Usage for fire	Carbon Dioxide Gas	Water	Dry Powder	Clean Agent	Foam
Electrical nature	★		★	★	
Flammable liquids	★		★	★	★
Electronic equipment or documents	★			★	
Wood, plastic, textiles and paper		★			

Fire fighting equipment in the workplace should be properly maintained in efficient working order, kept readily available for use and free from obstruction.

No person should damage and interfere with the fire fighting equipment or do anything to prevent the equipment from being used.

5 FIRE INSTRUCTION NOTICES

Employers and occupiers of workplaces should devise a fire emergency plan in writing so that all employees can respond quickly and correctly in case of fire.

Fire instruction 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 include:

- 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 stay at workplace to collect personal belongings;
- that staff should fight the fire using the equipment available if it is safe to do so, but do not use water on fires of electrical origin;
- that staff should not re-enter the workplace until it is certified safe to do so;
- that all smoke doors should be kept closed at all times;
- that lifts are not to be used in case of fire; and
- the means of calling nearby fire stations and their phone numbers.

6 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 that every employee receives instructions at least once, preferably twice, in every 12 months.

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

For employees who do not understand Chinese or English, training should be given in a manner that they can understand. Non-Cantonese or non-English speakers and employees who have 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 measures;
- actions to be taken upon discovering a fire;
- methods of raising the alarm;
- actions to be taken upon hearing a fire alarm;
- the correct method of calling the Fire Services Department or the Hong Kong Police Force (by dialing 999) to the scene;
- the location and usage 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
- closing all smoke doors at all times.

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

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



7 FIRE DRILLS IN WORKPLACES

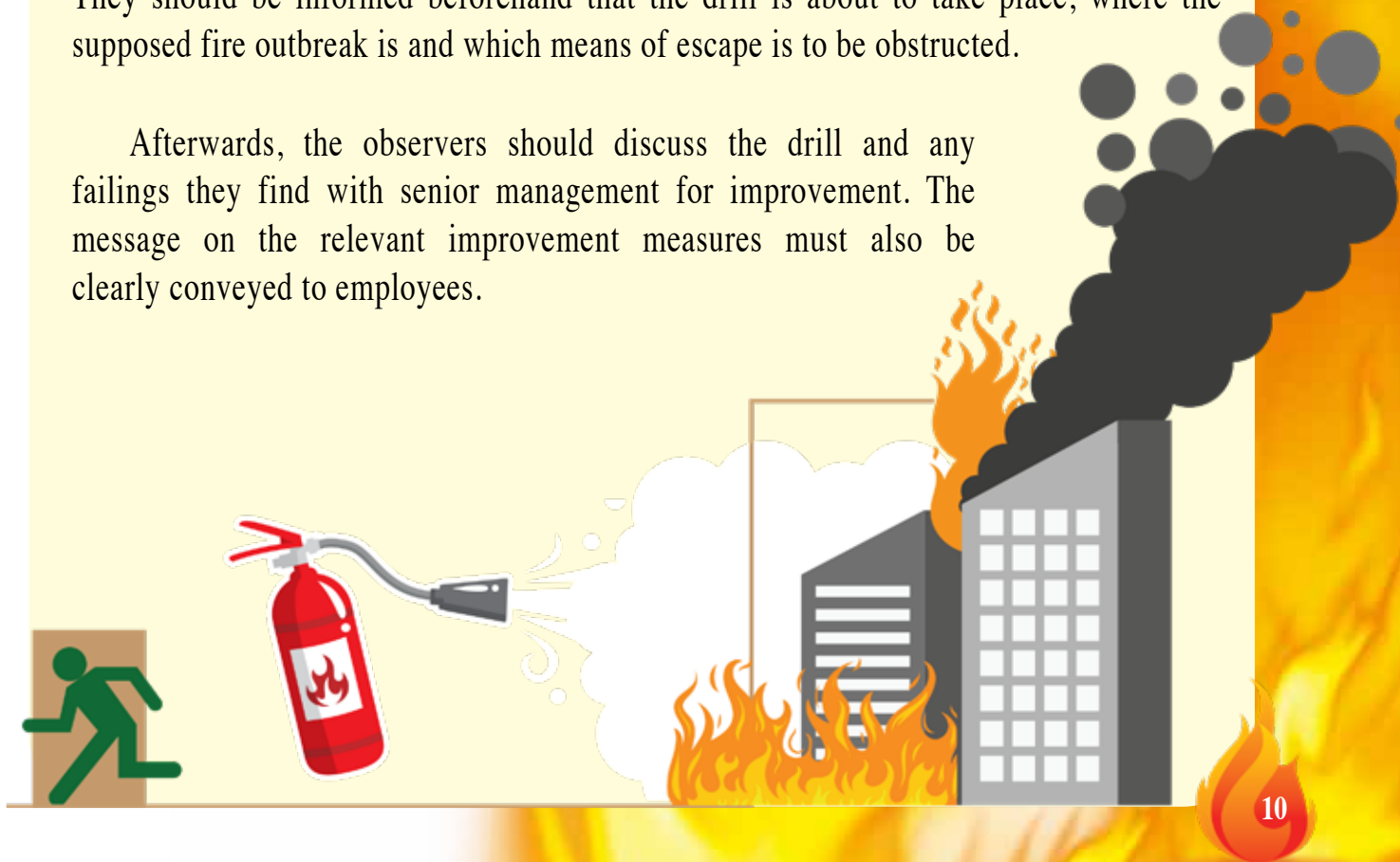
Fire drills should be carried out at least once a year, but at more frequent intervals in large workplaces or in workplaces where the public is present. Where there are alternative means of escape, the drill should be based on the assumption that one or more of the escape routes cannot be used because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

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

All staff should fully understand the means of fire warning and the fire emergency plan. New employees should receive immediate instructions on the actions to be taken in the event of fire, including a walk over all means of escape. The validity of the agreed procedures should be tested by an evacuation drill at least once a year.

In many organisations, it is usual to appoint a small group of people including managerial personnel, supervisors and employees as observers to observe fire drills. They should be informed 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 for improvement. The message on the relevant improvement measures must also be clearly conveyed to employees.



8 GOOD HOUSEKEEPING AND PREVENTION OF FIRE

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

Examples of poor housekeeping which will cause common fire hazards include:

- accumulation of rubbish, paper or other materials that can easily catch fire;
- smoking at workplace;
- careless handling or over-storage of flammable substances;
- poor condition of or overload on electrical circuits, wiring, plugs and sockets;
- electrical equipment left switched on when not in use (unless designed to be permanently connected);
- combustible material left close to sources of heat;
- obstruction of the ventilation of heaters, machinery or office equipment;
- inadequate cleaning of work areas;
- exits and exit doors being locked up;
- obstruction to means of escape;
- wedged smoke doors; and
- lack of proper maintenance and obstruction to fire service installations and equipment.

Although fire precautions on good housekeeping are mainly common sense, employees still 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:

- rubbish, wastepaper or other materials that may catch fire do not accumulate in, or be adjacent to, any buildings;
- prohibition of smoking at workplaces;
- flammable substances are kept in an appropriate place with appropriate quantities;
- electrical circuits, wiring, plugs and sockets are correctly fused and sound and not overloaded; regular maintenance and repairs are carried out by a competent person;
- electrical equipment is switched off when not in use (unless it is designed to be permanently connected);
- materials that may easily catch fire are kept away from sources of heat;
- machinery and office equipment are well ventilated and regularly cleaned (particularly important in a factory where fluff and dust can gather and mix with grease);
- all work areas are cleaned on a regular basis;
- all exits and exit doors are kept unlocked at all times when there are people in the workplaces;
- all means of escape are kept clear of obstruction at all times;
- smoke doors are kept closed at all times; and
- all fire service installations and equipment are well maintained.

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

9 ENQUIRIES AND COMPLAINTS

ENQUIRIES

If you wish to enquire about this Guidance Notes or require advice on occupational safety and health (OSH) matters, please contact the Occupational Safety and Health Branch of Labour Department (LD) through:

Telephone : 2559 2297 (auto-recording service available outside office hours)

Fax : 2915 1410

E-mail : enquiry@labour.gov.hk

Information on the services offered by LD and on major labour legislation is also available on our website at www.labour.gov.hk.

For details on the services offered by the Occupational Safety and Health Council, please call 2739 9000.

COMPLAINTS

If you have any complaint about unsafe operations and environments at workplaces, please call the LD's OSH complaint hotline at 2542 2172, or fill out and submit an online OSH platform form on our website. All complaints will be treated in the strictest confidence.



Online OSH Complaint Form