

The layperson's  
guide to

# **fire & safety in the workplace**

## Content links

How to use this guide

What's the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005?

How to do a risk assessment

Who's the responsible person?

What should happen when the fire alarm goes off

Picking a fire warden

Dangerous substances in the workplace

More dangerous substance guidelines

What fire fighting equipment?

'Serious and imminent danger'

Someone to help the Responsible Person

What to tell the workers

Safety training you'll need to cover

An inspector calls

Notes about offences

What's the difference between types of fire?

Why are there lots of fire extinguishers?

Which one do I need?

How the Fire and Safety Centre can help you

The Fire and Safety Centre is a responsible online retailer committed not only to the supply of the best approved fire protection equipment, but also to providing impartial and honest advice so that all organisations, customers or not, can be aware of their responsibilities under fire legislation.

With our friendly, knowledgeable staff, you can be assured that we want to have your best interests at heart at all times – and that's my promise to you.

*Barrie Holden*  
Owner

**For more  
information,  
click here:**



# How to use this guide

This guide is intended to be a starting point for the layperson with the responsibility for fire safety, as defined by the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005, for the premises in which they work.

It is not intended to be a comprehensive resource for everything to do with fire and safety legislation, products and their use, which would make it a very large and hard-to-navigate resource. Instead it is a starting point for understanding what's involved in the topics being covered; for identifying gaps in knowledge, and for finding sources of information and further reading to fill those gaps.

It is our intention to highlight, in the burgundy text, the 'must know' facts on every topic we cover. These will be supplemented by the green instant reference panel at the right of each page.

The green panel concludes with a 'more' button which is a link to further invaluable reading. What it links to will be appropriate to the topic being featured.

This guide is meant for reference purposes only, and it is not intended to be the definitive guide to fire safety in the workplace.



## Key facts:

1. These green panels will contain an at a glance reference to the topic being featured.
2. The guide is intended to be a quick reference resource offering an 'executive summary' of key points.
3. Further guidance and reading will be found by clicking the green 'more' button and other topic-specific links on each page.

**For more  
information,  
click here:**



# The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005:

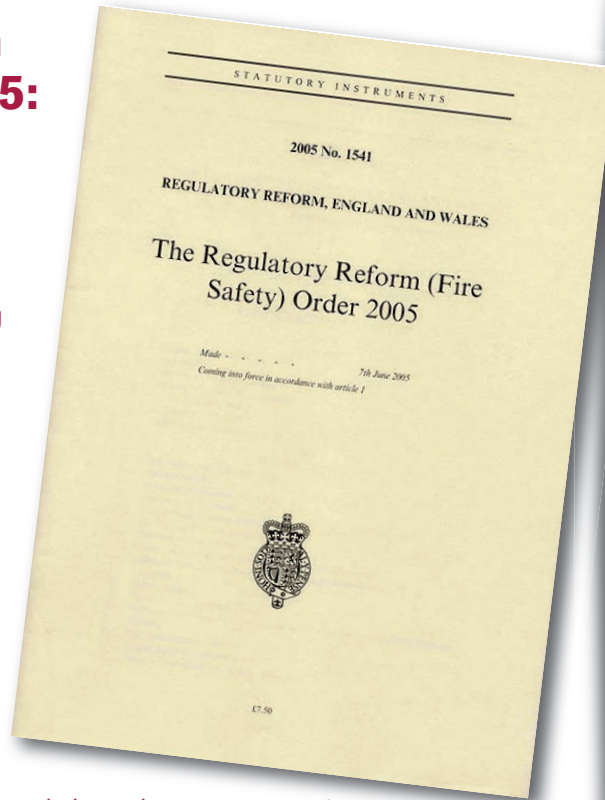
**What it is:** A piece of fire safety legislation covering all non-domestic premises in England and Wales.

**When it started:** The clue's in the name. This legislation was enacted in 2005, having been three years in the making.

**Why it was necessary:** Fire safety legislation had developed piecemeal, often in response to specific incidents, where it was designed to prevent the same thing happening again. Having large numbers of laws made things tough for business because there were numerous areas in which they overlapped, and companies were having to deal with more than one enforcement body.

It was all very complex, and there were inconsistencies. It was complicated for trained people to understand, never mind the layperson like yourself!

**How it works:** All of the diverse laws have been brought together in one place. The new law covers all workplaces, but not homes. It



is based on assessment of risks by a Responsible Person who should have the safety of the occupants of a building at the front of their mind when the assessments are being completed.

Key facts:

1. 2005: one law replaces many. New law often known as the 'RRO'.
2. Confusion removed; new law easier to understand.
3. Covers the whole of England and Wales, but not homes.
4. Introduces the concept of 'responsible person' for the first time.

**For more information, click here:**



## Know your enemy:

# How to do an effective fire risk assessment

**Definition:** A fire risk assessment is the fire safety benchmark for your building.

It will:

- establish all of its fire risks
- steer you towards reducing or eliminating them
- show you who needs protecting
- help you establish an emergency plan and escape routes

**If you're the responsible person:** People's lives will depend on how well you undertake this task, so be thorough, and never underestimate its importance.

**How to do it:** Walk around the building. Think 'fire'. How could one start? What would make a fire worse? Would people be able to get out?

Look out for (and record your findings) about, but not limited to:

- things that could start fires
- blocked emergency exits



- fire extinguishers obstructed or missing
- unnecessary storage of flammable material
- the number and position of smoke alarms

**Next steps:** Armed with that information, tackle issues one at a time to make improvements.

**Blocked fire exits?** Unblock them, and establish procedures to see they stay that way. **Hidden extinguishers?** Move obstructions, or move the extinguishers. **People at risk?** Change working practices or equipment to mitigate the risk. Apply common sense and imagine the worst.

**Write an escape plan:** Think of everyone, which will include the disabled, visitors, and children. Make sure everyone understands it, and what they must do in an emergency.

**Intimidated by the task?:** Get help. The fire service will advise you, but you must do the assessment. Useful links are in the green panel.

At a glance:

1. Identify the 'Responsible Person' using the next page of our e-book.
2. Responsible Person's duties:
  - Look for risks
  - Eliminate or reduce them
  - Identify who's at risk
  - Record findings
  - Write emergency plan
  - Train as necessary
  - Review regularly
  - Modify when necessary
  - Stay safe
3. Links to sources of help:
  - Risk assessment chart
  - Fire safety advice documents

**For information in more detail, click here:**

**MORE**

# So now you're responsible... What exactly does that mean?

**Definition:** We're talking about the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 here, so being the 'Responsible Person' has been carefully defined.

If it's a workplace, and you're the employer, then the buck starts with you. However, the law recognises that there may be no reason for you to be in the building just because you employ the people working there. It might be a branch office or a subsidiary company, for example. When that's the case, the responsibility falls onto the manager who's in control of the building.

There's no reason why the responsibility can't be delegated, but it must not be overlooked. It's important to remember that the responsibility will never go away, and anyone in a senior position who



chooses to delegate it to someone else must give that individual the authority and support to do it properly.

It doesn't matter about the type of work going on. If people are working there, there must be a Responsible Person to keep them safe from fire. If you share your responsibilities within a building, the law says you must work with other Responsible Persons to make sure the whole of the premises is covered.

**This work is serious.** Failure to comply with the RRO can result in a fine of up to £5,000 or two years in jail – for the individual...

At a glance:

1. Every workplace must have a 'Responsible Person'.
2. The Responsible Person's role is important, so the law says it is the employer or, in their absence, the person in control of the activities involved.

The role can be delegated, but its importance must never be minimised and it must never be overlooked.

Whoever is named for the role must have authority and support to do it properly

3. Links to sources of help:

Fire safety advice documents

**For information  
in more detail,  
click here:**



# What happens when the alarm sounds? How to get everyone to safety

This is a two-stage process. The first stage is about planning, and is covered here; the second is about doing it, and features on the next page.

**Planning:** This happens as a result of the risk assessment done by the nominated Responsible Person. Common sense is a good guide, and will steer you to the right decisions.

Imagine the fire alarm is sounding, and people have to get out of the building quickly. With that in mind, check:

- passageways to escape routes are clear
- signs show where emergency exits are
- emergency exits aren't blocked, and doors can easily be opened
- there is emergency lighting, if necessary
- you have enough safe meeting points outside, clearly identified with appropriate signage.

- disabled people and visitors can use the emergency exits
- evacuation chairs are provided, and people are trained in their use

You must also:

- develop evacuation plans for the less mobile
- appoint fire wardens (see next page)



Run **training sessions** so everyone knows what to do when the alarm sounds. **Set up** planned and unannounced drills to check that the procedures you've established work in practice. Include a short **briefing for all visitors**, who need to be told if a fire drill is planned, or if it's for real. Ensure visitors are **accompanied** at all times.

At a glance:

1. Pretend it's for real, and check escape routes.
2. Make sure everyone knows how to get out.
3. Appoint fire wardens.
4. Make provision for the disabled and visitors.
5. Create muster points in safe areas outside.

**For information  
in more detail,  
click here:**





# Phew! Everyone's out safely. But how can you be certain?

This page is intended to advise on what to do in a real evacuation.

Responsibility and authority should be given to a designated individual in any workplace. This is the Fire Warden. The person to pick is someone who is usually present (not a member of the outside sales team, for example).

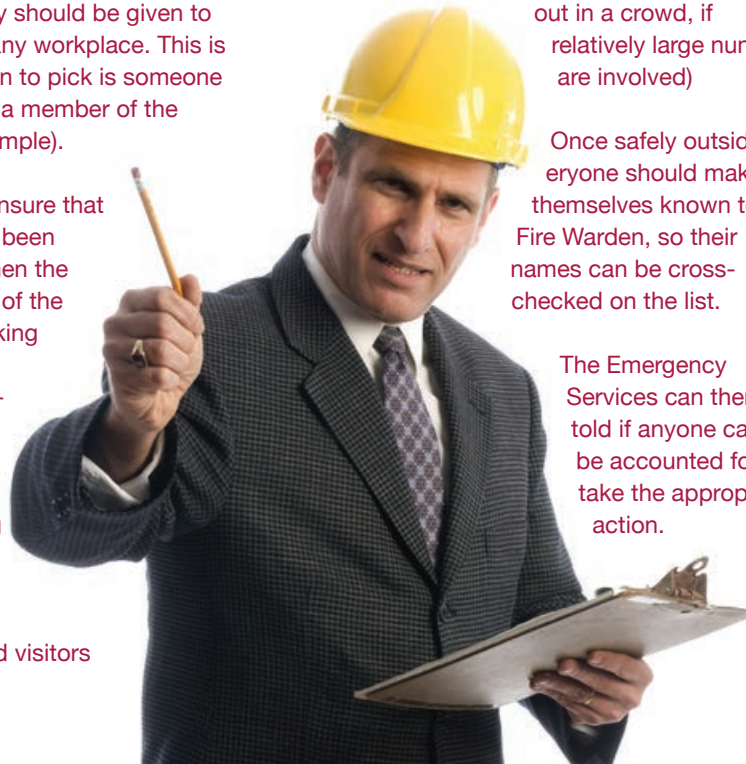
This individual's role is to ensure that everyone (who has already been instructed in what to do when the alarm sounds) is safely out of the building – but not by checking it themselves. They should leave as promptly as everyone else, taking with them:

- list of everyone who should be in the building (on a clipboard)
- in/out board to record temporary absence
- signing-in book to record visitors

- pen or pencil
- high-vis vest, preferably with 'Fire Warden' printed on it, or hard hat (to make them stand out in a crowd, if relatively large numbers are involved)

Once safely outside, everyone should make themselves known to the Fire Warden, so their names can be cross-checked on the list.

The Emergency Services can then be told if anyone cannot be accounted for, and take the appropriate action.



At a glance:

1. Appoint and train enough Fire Wardens for your building. One per building may be enough; one per floor may be appropriate for larger buildings.
2. Provide right equipment.
3. Assign to evacuation point.
4. Instruct everyone to report to them when there's an evacuation.

**For information  
in more detail,  
click here:**





# What you need to do about dangerous substances in the workplace

The first question the Responsible Person must ask about dangerous substances used in the workplace is: “Do we need them at all?”

The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005, is quite specific about the response to dangerous substances. People must be kept safe from them, and the first step in that process is to ask if there is an alternative substance or process that could be used instead.

In an ideal world, there probably would be. However, since we don't live in an ideal world, measures have to be put in place to control the risk and mitigate the effects of a fire, if one should occur. As the Responsible Person, that's your job.

Tackle that by setting up measures that keep the substances safe at all times, which must include the way they're transported, handled and stored. And that's all dangerous substances, as well as anything that might contain them.

To do that, it's important to know which materials can be stored together, and which must be kept in isolation. That's not difficult to establish; we have a useful chart showing the details. A link to it is in the green panel.



At a glance:

1. Can you find an alternative that takes the dangerous substance out the workplace? If so, use it.
2. If not, control the risk.
3. Mitigate effects of fire.
4. Set up procedures for transport, handling and storage. Train people in the details.
5. Understand what can be stored with what. See our chart here.

**For information  
in more detail,  
click here:**



# Dangerous substances: More safeguards to implement

As Responsible Person, ask yourself what would be the appropriate reaction to something going wrong where dangerous substances and processes are involved – and what would everyone need to have and know how to deal with a situation safely.

The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 has gone through that thinking, and come up with a list of actions both for before an incident and when one happens.

## Before:

- Record the hazards and have details available
- Plan escape routes; train people about them
- Identify places of safety
- Install visual and audible warnings (and be sure people know how to react to them)
- Establish a way of informing anyone who may be affected (and this may be beyond your own boundaries; think about the escape of toxic smoke, for example)
- Plan for a response from trained in-house personnel and the Emergency Services
- Provide PPE and training for people who have to go in to make the incident safe

## During:

- Contact Emergency Services
- Take steps to mitigate any fire
- Evacuate anyone in danger (again, this may be beyond your own boundary)

It may be that your risk assessment shows that because only small quantities of hazardous substances are present, then risks to individuals are small too. Take advice about how best to create and deal with these smaller risks.



At a glance:

1. Expect the worst, and plan for it.
2. Record hazards.
3. Set up emergency procedures.
4. Provide right equipment.
5. Install warning signs and alarms.
6. Liaise with Emergency Services.

**For information  
in more detail,  
click here:**



# Fire-fighting equipment: What to provide, and what to do afterwards

It might seem obvious in an e-book about fire safety, but it's the job of the Responsible Person to make sure a correct range of fire protection equipment is available – but that's only part of the story.

Let's start with the 'what'. This covers fire-fighting equipment including extinguishers of all kinds, alarms, smoke detectors, blankets and hoses. It also includes facilities for professional fire fighters such as water supplies, hard standing for appliances, fire escapes, etc.

All of these have to be appropriate to the fires they're intended to be used against, which we explain on another page. (This is about which extinguishers are appropriate for which fires, because you can't use all of them on all kinds of fire). When acquiring these they should always be bought new from a reputable supplier.

The equipment needs to be carefully placed, never obscured or obstructed, and have the right signs in place.



Some fire protection equipment is automatic. Where it isn't, people need to be instructed in how to use it so they're not injured in trying to fight a fire.

Importantly, don't forget that fire protection equipment is not fit and forget technology; regular servicing is required, and that needs to be done by a qualified person. Contact your supplier.

At a glance:

1. Pick fire protection equipment to suit the hazards and size of your premises. Get advice from your supplier.
2. Never buy second-hand.
3. Have systems properly installed by professionals.
3. Maintain it properly and regularly.
4. Train people in its use.
5. Link to further information:  
How to pick a fire extinguisher.

**For information  
in more detail,  
click here:**



# Prepare for and react to ‘serious and imminent danger’

Dangerous areas present greater risks to the people who work in them, and the Responsible Person is required to take extra measures to take care of their welfare.

When there is ‘serious and imminent danger’ people need to know what to do and where to go, and it’s the role of the Responsible Person to see that they do, including staging safety drills for practice.

You’ll also need to make sure there are enough people with training, experience or knowledge to make sure dangerous areas can be evacuated quickly and safely if that needs to happen.



You must:

- Tell people of the risks
- Say what’s been done to protect them
- Tell them to stop work immediately and go to a place of safety when required
- Keep them away from the area until it’s safe to return

At a glance:

1. Set up evacuation procedures.
2. Explain the hazards.
3. Explain where the safe places are.
4. Have enough people to make sure evacuation can be done safely.
5. Keep people away until it’s safe to return.

For information  
in more detail,  
click here:



# Being ‘Responsible Person’ doesn’t have to be a solo effort

The law doesn’t expect you to be Responsible Person alone; in fact it requires you to appoint others to assist.

Just how many you need will depend on how large and complex your premises or organisation, but it’s their role to share with you the preventive and protective measures you’re setting up.

As Responsible Person it’s up to you to determine the number of others (the law calls them ‘competent persons’) you need to help – but you have to tell them all about anything that affects the safety of those using the premises – and that includes things you only think might be relevant.

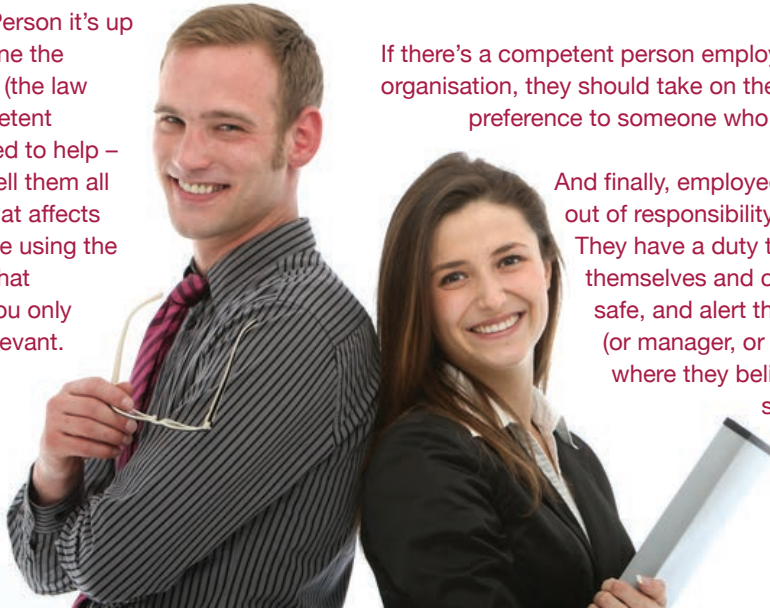
Included in what you must share are details of all full-time em-

ployees and anyone working under a fixed-term contract. (For the law, ‘competent’ means someone has the right knowledge based on training and experience).

Specifically excluded are self-employed people or those in partnerships having the right training and knowledge to be the competent person themselves.

If there’s a competent person employed in your organisation, they should take on the role in preference to someone who isn’t.

And finally, employees can’t duck out of responsibility for safety. They have a duty to keep themselves and colleagues safe, and alert their employer (or manager, or you) to areas where they believe there are shortcomings in safety provision.



At a glance:

1. Don’t do the job alone.
2. Select enough competent persons to help based on the size and nature of the organisation.
3. Tell them everything, even if you think it only ‘might’ be relevant.
4. Select people from within the organisation.
5. All employees have a safety duty too!

**For information  
in more detail,  
click here:**



# What you need to tell the workers (or their parents)

Having made all these arrangements as Responsible Person, you still have a responsibility to the employees on the premises.

They need information, and it's your job to provide it. They need to know the following:

- The risks they face (as identified in your risk assessment)
- The measures you've put in place to prevent anything going wrong
- What you've put in place to protect them
- The Competent People you've appointed, and the risks you've explained to them
- Details of dangerous substances in the workplace including
  - their name
  - a relevant data sheet
  - what the law says about the hazardous properties of the substance
  - significant findings from your risk assessment



## Who else?

If you've employed a child in an appropriate role, the same things must be notified to their parents (which, for the purposes of the law, means anyone with parental responsibility).

Clearly there are times when other people might come onto your premises to undertake all manner of work. As Responsible Person you need to provide them as well as their employer with information about the risks involved with being on your site, and the measures you've taken to protect them.

Have robust signing-in procedures, provide appropriate safety clothing, and consider the value in having visitors accompanied at all times, or taking part in an appropriate safety induction.

At a glance:

1. Employees must be told about your risk assessment and its findings. Details are on the left.
2. Tell contractors too.

**For information  
in more detail,  
click here:**





# Safety training you'll need to do

Keeping people safe from the workplace hazards to be faced is an ongoing job. The obvious time you'll need to do it is when a new employee joins the business. They'll need to be told about dangerous substances and processes, and the hazards that are present. Remember that hazards which might seem obvious to you may not be so obvious to a new starter, so identify and highlight them all.

But such induction training isn't the only time information needs to be shared.

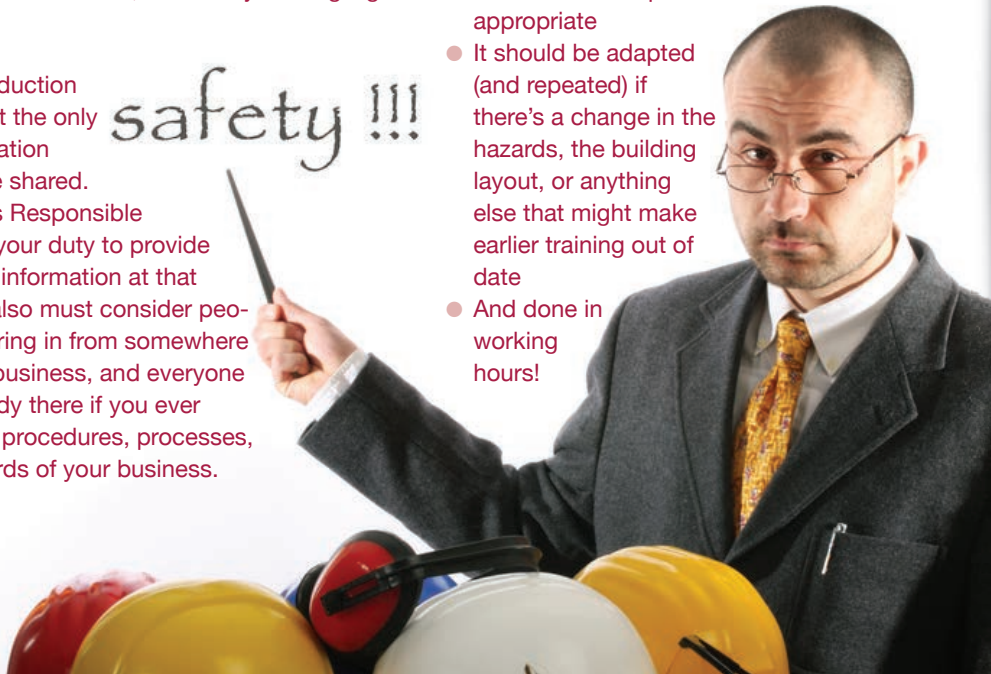
Although as Responsible Person it's your duty to provide all the right information at that point, you also must consider people transferring in from somewhere else in the business, and everyone who's already there if you ever change the procedures, processes, or the hazards of your business.

safety !!!

## What training has to cover

Training must include instruction and precautions to be taken by employees to protect not only themselves but also their colleagues and the business.

- It needs to be repeated from time to time as appropriate
- It should be adapted (and repeated) if there's a change in the hazards, the building layout, or anything else that might make earlier training out of date
- And done in working hours!



At a glance:

1. Safety training should be done at induction.
2. Include those transferring from other parts of the business (even if they're not new starters).
3. Update and repeat changes when circumstances change in the business (new or reduced hazards; changed procedures).
4. Run refresher courses.
5. No-one should ever be in a position to say: "No-one told me".

**For information  
in more detail,  
click here:**



# Checks and balances: What if an inspector calls?

Part of the The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 includes a system of checks and balances to see that the Responsible Person has done what's necessary.

Although inspectors have no right to force entry or search your premises, they are able to ask for your help, as the Responsible Person, in their examination of what's been put in place to make sure your premises comply with the law.

Inspections must be made at a reasonable time – but what that actually means will depend on the kind of activities you're engaged in.

They can ask you to produce samples to check their fire resistance or flammability.

In practice, the inspection work is normally done by the fire service. If your premises

are deemed to be high risk, you may be given an alterations notice. This is an instruction that you're not allowed to make changes without discussing plans to the fire service. This is a collaborative process; work with the fire service to understand what they want to know about because they have your best interests at heart.

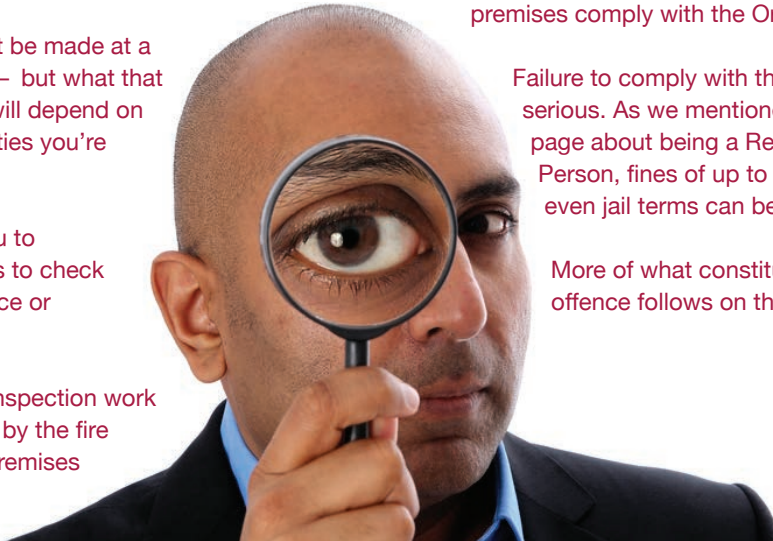
You're not allowed to make employees pay for the cost of anything you do to make sure your premises comply with the Order.

Failure to comply with the order is serious. As we mentioned on the first page about being a Responsible Person, fines of up to £5,000 or even jail terms can be involved.

More of what constitutes an offence follows on the next page.

At a glance:

1. Co-operate with inspectors from the enforcing authority (in practice, probably the fire service).
2. Work with the inspectors to keep people safe.
3. In high-risk premises, make no changes that might affect fire safety without proper consultation.



**For information  
in more detail,  
click here:**



# Legal failures: When have you committed an offence?

It's important to remember that the RRO does not contain guidelines; it's the law. As a result you'd expect there to be offences, and penalties for committing them.

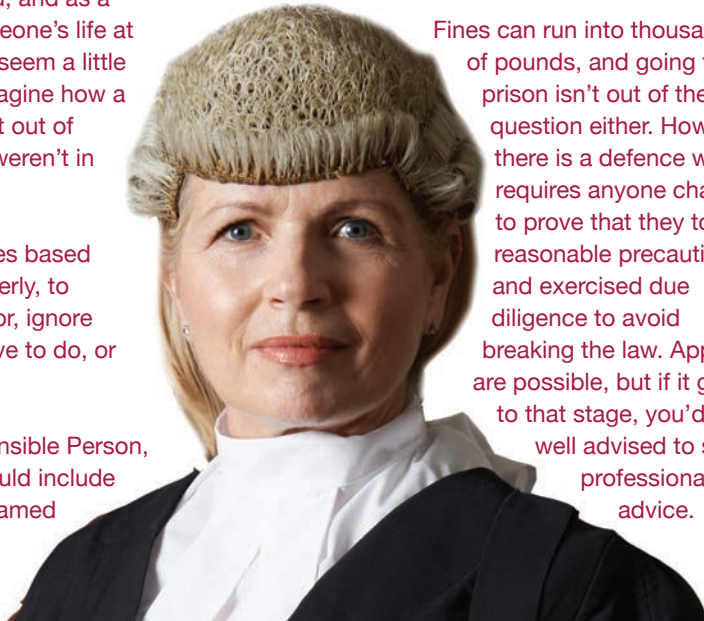
Details of the offences are in Article 32 of the Order, but they basically say that it's an offence to fail to do what it requires of you, and as a consequence, to have put someone's life at risk. Putting a life at risk might seem a little extreme, but it's not hard to imagine how a small incident could quickly get out of hand with the right provisions weren't in place.

There is also a series of offences based on failure to record things properly, to deceive or obstruct an inspector, ignore what an inspector says you have to do, or to give false information.

All of these apply to the Responsible Person, but extend beyond that and could include a body corporate, or another named individual who should have

undertaken a task but failed to do so. Crucially, that last point makes it plain that a prosecution of a third party doesn't necessarily have to mean that the Responsible Person will also be prosecuted. And finally, no employer is immune from prosecution for the acts of his employee, if the employee breaks the law.

Fines can run into thousands of pounds, and going to prison isn't out of the question either. However, there is a defence which requires anyone charged to prove that they took all reasonable precautions and exercised due diligence to avoid breaking the law. Appeals are possible, but if it gets to that stage, you'd be well advised to seek professional advice.



At a glance:

1. The RRO is a law, not a set of guidelines.
2. As Responsible Person you can be prosecuted for breaking the law.
3. Employers and others involved in putting in place anything to do with the RRO can also be prosecuted.
4. Do a proper job. People's lives may depend on it.
5. Other legal provisions exist, but if you've done the basics correctly you shouldn't need to get involved in those.

**For information  
in more detail,  
click here:**



# All fires are the same, right?

Wrong. All might have similar consequences, but they're sub-divided into different classes based on the material that's burning – because they'll need fighting with different equipment. Here's a brief rundown of the types of fire you might be faced with, and the extinguishers you'll need to bring them under control.

**Class A:** Burning solids like wood, paper and plastic.  
Extinguisher types: water, foam, dry powder and wet chemical units.

**Class B:** Burning liquids, such as paraffin, petrol, oil.  
Extinguisher types: foam, dry powder, CO2 gas.

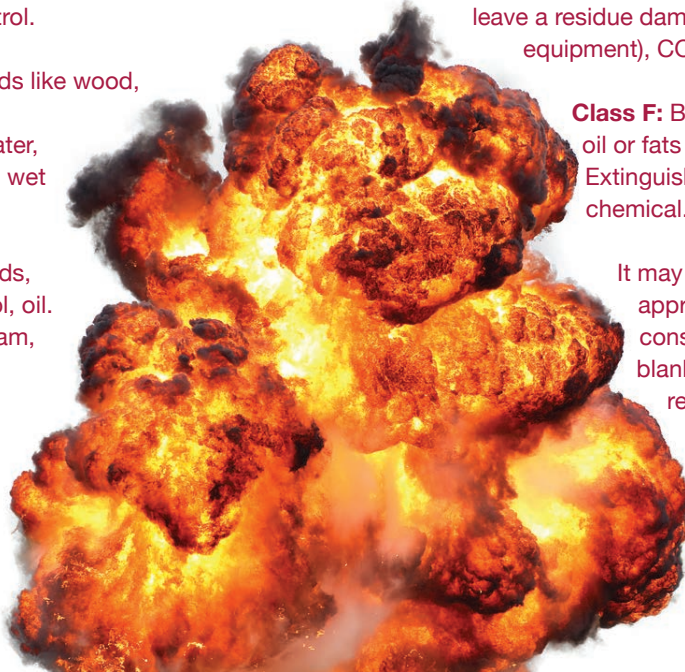
**Class C:**  
Burning gases, such as propane, butane, methane.  
Extinguisher type: dry powder.

**Class D:** Burning metals, such as aluminium, magnesium, titanium etc.  
Extinguisher type: M28/L2 dry powder.

**Class E:** Fires involving electrical equipment.  
Extinguisher type: dry powder (but these may leave a residue damaging electrical equipment), CO2 gas.

**Class F:** Burning cooking oil or fats (kitchen fires)  
Extinguisher type: wet chemical.

It may also be appropriate to consider fire blankets and hose reels as well as extinguishers.



At a glance:

1. Fires are categorised by the fuel that's burning.
2. Different fires need the appropriate fire-fighting equipment.
3. If in doubt, consult experts. That may be a reputable and qualified supplier or your own Fire Service.

Further advice:

Classes of fire  
Types of extinguisher  
Hose reels  
Fire blankets

For information  
in more detail,  
click here:



# Know your extinguishers

Fire extinguishers are usually red, but a small proportion of them are in different colours and finishes depending on application (for instance, high-end locations and clean areas like kitchens may have ones in a silver finish).

All are identified with coloured labels. Here's a guide to which is which. Each line below links to more information about that type of extinguisher.

WATER:	Red label
FOAM:	Cream label
DRY POWDER:	Blue label
CO2 GAS:	Black label
WET CHEMICAL:	Yellow label
WATER MIST:	White label

Extinguishers come in different capacities too. Seek advice about which is appropriate to your hazards.



At a glance:

1. Coloured labels tell you which fire can be fought with which extinguisher.
2. Match risks to the extinguishers you select.
3. If in doubt, consult experts. That may be a reputable and qualified supplier or your own Fire Service.

Further advice:

Classes of fire  
Types of extinguisher  
Hose reels  
Fire blankets

**For information  
in more detail,  
click here:**





# The Fire and Safety Centre and your role as Responsible Person

Having looked through this guide you may feel intimidated about the task of being Responsible Person, but you shouldn't be.

The rules laid down in the RRO, or Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005, are clear, so you should understand that you have the law on your side when it comes to making sure people, premises, and products are safe from fire.

Furthermore, you are not alone in the task. Expert advice is available. Everyone at The Fire and Safety Centre knows about the products you may need to help you fulfil your obligations under the law, how they work, and how to get them to you quickly.

As a major online retailer we have created a web site packed with comprehensive detail about the products themselves, the standards to which they are approved, and links to 'companion products' which you may also need.

We offer comprehensive advice pages putting a considerable amount of information at your fingertips in an easy-to-access-and-understand format. We are enthusiastic bloggers too, and have built a library of material covering, at one time or another, the principal topics of fire safety.

We understand that you may have lots of questions not only about our products, but also about how they work and how to service them, and you will no doubt need assurances about what you're buying from us. All of those points are covered in our Frequently-Asked Questions section, and we'd be happy to go through them using our live chat facility or over the phone.

We also offer service and maintenance packages throughout Lincolnshire, South Yorkshire and northern Nottinghamshire.

**The Fire and Safety Centre: Your friend in the fire protection business.**

At a glance:

1. Don't be intimidated by the role of Responsible Person.
2. The Fire and Safety Centre is here to help you.
3. Our web site and our staff advise about products and their use through product pages, an advice library, FAQs, and a comprehensive blog.

[www.fireandsafetycentre.co.uk](http://www.fireandsafetycentre.co.uk)



**For information  
in more detail,  
click here:**

