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Title: A Guide to Choosing a Competent Fire Risk Assessor

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Distribution

CFOA Members Fire & Rescue Service General Public

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Summary

On 1st February 2013 the Fire Risk Assessment Competency Council, under the auspices of the Fire Sector Federation published a Guide for Responsible Persons. The Guide provides advice and information when appointing a specialist to undertake the Fire Risk Assessment and provide fire safety advice.

The guide provides advice on finding a specialist person or body, and identifies the certificating bodies that operate registration schemes.

CFOA, the Fire Sector Federation and the Competency Council strongly encourage all Fire & Rescue Services to publish this guide (via their own websites) as widely as possible to help achieve compliance with fire safety legislation in the UK.

FIRE RISK ASSESSMENT COMPETENCY COUNCIL

A Guide to Choosing a Competent Fire Risk Assessor

Version 1

Published 1/2/13

The Fire Risk Assessment Competency Council is a workstream consisting of the major stakeholders concerned with this aspect of the fire safety sector. It works within the wider Fire Sector Federation and has published a set of criteria against which the competency of those undertaking fire risk assessments can be judged.

This guide is intended to be an easy to read introduction to choosing a competent fire risk assessor.

This document will be updated regularly, therefore, please ensure that you are using the most recent version.

Choosing a Competent Fire Risk Assessor

Fire safety legislation in the United Kingdom applies generally to all non-domestic premises. This includes all commercial premises and workplaces, including those managed by voluntary organisations and the self-employed and all premises to which the public have access, including, in England and Wales, the common parts of multi-occupied residential buildings such as flats and houses in multiple occupation.

If you are an employer, then you will have a duty under the appropriate fire safety legislation to carry out a fire risk assessment. Similarly, if you occupy or otherwise have a degree of control over any non-domestic premises (or if empty and you own it), then you are likely to have this duty.

This guide is provided to help those with this responsibility (referred to as 'duty holders' in this document) decide who should carry out a fire risk assessment so that the premises comply with the applicable fire safety legislation:

- In England and Wales the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.
www.gov.uk/workplace-fire-safety-your-responsibilities/who-is-responsible
- In Scotland the Fire (Scotland Act) 2005 and the Fire Safety (Scotland) Regulations 2006 www.firelawscotland.org
- In Northern Ireland the Fire and Rescue Services (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 and the Fire Safety Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010
www.nifrs.org/firesafe/

A fire risk assessment identifies possible hazards as well as the actions you need to take to keep the people on your premises safe. It needs to be kept up to date and reviewed on a regular basis, in particular when something changes that could affect fire safety or you have any other reason to suspect that it is no longer valid (e.g. a change in occupancy, in the building, in nature of contents or after a fire).

Can I do it myself?

Duty holders – particularly in small or low-risk premises - may be able to carry out their own fire risk assessment, using guidance available on the websites listed above.

Those carrying out a fire risk assessment must be satisfied that they are able to:

- Identify the fire hazards (i.e. potential causes of fire)
- Identify people at risk
- Evaluate fire safety measures provided and/or required to protect people (e.g. escape routes and fire alarm systems)
- Review the arrangements for management of fire safety (e.g. fire procedures, staff training and fire drills, maintenance of fire precautions, etc.)
- Formulate an action plan
- Record the significant findings and, if necessary, implement an action plan
- Keep the assessment up to date.

Doing the assessment in house has the advantage of ensuring that you own and understand the precautions you need to take to protect people adequately.

You need, however, to know your limits. If you feel, having read the guidance, that you do not have an appropriate knowledge or understanding of fire safety and the risk to people from fire to comply effectively with the legislative requirements; or, that you are unable to invest sufficient time and resources to do justice to this important task, you will need to appoint a specialist to carry out the risk assessment for you. Such a specialist must identify the fire safety measures that need to be in place. You should maintain close involvement in the process.

Appointing a specialist to carry out a fire risk assessment

No matter who carries out the fire risk assessment the duty holder retains the responsibility for ensuring the adequacy of that assessment. If employing a specialist to undertake your fire risk assessment, whilst you are not expected to be an expert in fire safety, you should make reasonable checks to ensure that they are competent to do the job properly.

There are some simple steps and precautions you can take to help verify the competence and suitability of a prospective fire risk assessor:

- Be satisfied that the fire risk assessor providing this service is competent to do so. We recommend you check that those providing this service have independent registration with, or certification from, a professional or certification body and that they meet the competency criteria established by the Fire Risk Assessment Competency Council (see list below)
- Check that they have experience of undertaking fire risk assessments for your kind of business and premises
- Request references from previous clients in premises of your type; ask these clients if they were satisfied and if any problems were later identified

You should also undertake the following:

- Ensure that the scope of the work you want carried out is agreed in writing.
- Ensure that you provide the assessor with access to all areas of the premises and with all relevant information
- Obtain alternative quotes – make sure they all cover the same scope, so you can compare like with like
- Ask for proof that they have sufficient professional indemnity insurance, public liability insurance and assure yourself that the fire risk assessor is impartial and you have access to a complaints procedure if necessary
- Ensure you have adequate records of the steps you took in selecting your fire risk assessor.

Note : Fire and Rescue Authorities enforce fire safety legislation for the vast majority of premises. They will not complete a fire risk assessment for you. However, if you have completed a fire risk assessment and you are concerned about its suitability, you may approach your local Fire and Rescue Service for advice and guidance.

How to find a competent fire risk assessor

It is important that the person who carries out the fire risk assessment is competent. There are two principal methods by which people can demonstrate their competence;

- Professional Body Registration schemes
- Certification by a Certification Body that is UKAS accredited for the activity.

It is also important that the company for whom the fire risk assessor works has adequate management systems in place, even if the fire risk assessor is self employed. Competence of a company to deliver fire risk assessments can be demonstrated by third party certification of the company by a UKAS accredited Certification Body.

Appendix 1 contains a list of Professional Bodies that operate Registration schemes and Certification Bodies that operate Certification schemes for fire risk assessors and fire risk assessment companies

The Fire Risk Assessment Competency Council recommends the use of fire risk assessment companies, including sole traders, which are third party certificated to appropriate schemes operated by Certification Bodies which have been UKAS accredited to certificate against such schemes.

As a duty holder, you do not need to be an expert in registration and certification schemes. The following information will give you a better understanding of these schemes and how they operate.

A '**scheme**' – identifies what needs to be assessed and what methods of assessment are used. As noted above, there are a number of schemes relating to fire risk assessment:

- A 'company' scheme is operated by a certification body and looks at the competence of personnel and the management systems within the company.
- A 'person certification' scheme is operated by a certification body and is concerned with the competency of the individual and not the competency of a company
- A 'professional body' scheme is operated by a professional body and is concerned with the competency of the individual and not the competency of a company.

All schemes maintain a register, which lists the individuals or companies that have been assessed to meet the requirements of the scheme.

Certification Bodies – Assess the fire risk assessor (individual or company) against the requirements of a 'scheme'.

The role of the United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS) is to accredit third party Certification Bodies for the certification work they carry out. UKAS is the national accreditation body recognized by Government for this purpose. UKAS accredit Certification Bodies, against internationally agreed standards, to confirm they are assessing correctly against 'scheme' requirements.

Appendix 1 : Register holders

This appendix is listed in alphabetical order.

Register holders	UKAS Accredited Company Certification Scheme	UKAS Accredited Person Certification Scheme	Professional Body Person Registration Scheme
The BAFE 'SP205' company scheme is delivered by the following UKAS accredited certification bodies:- ECA , NSI , SSAIB	✓		
Institute of Fire Prevention Officers (IFPO) This is a professional body registration scheme			✓
Institute of Fire Safety Managers (IFSM) This is a professional body registration scheme			✓
Institution of Fire Engineers (IFE) This is a professional body registration scheme			✓
Warrington Certification Ltd operate a 'Fire Risk Assessors Certification Scheme (Individuals) FRACS'		✓	