

GOOD HOUSEKEEPING & THE PREVENTION OF FIRE

General

The need for good housekeeping and sensible fire precautions cannot be over-emphasised, as these practices will reduce the possibility of a fire occurring. Poor housekeeping, carelessness and neglect not only make the outbreak of fire more likely but also will inevitably allow a fire to spread more rapidly.

The Falkland Islands Fire and Rescue Service will give advice and any help where applicable.

The Causes of Fire and Common Fire Hazards

1. Most fires can be prevented. The attention of staff should be drawn to the most common fire hazards and causes of fire which include:-
 - (a) Faulty, electrical wiring, plugs and sockets that are in poor condition, overloaded or inadequately protected by fuses or other devices.
 - (b) Electrical equipment left switched on when not in use (unless it is designed to be permanently connected).
 - (c) Smoking in unauthorised or high fire risk areas and the careless disposal of smoking materials.
 - (d) Accumulation of rubbish, paper or other materials which can easily catch fire.
 - (e) Careless use of portable heaters.
 - (f) Excess or careless storage of flammable substances and combustible materials.
 - (g) Obstructing the ventilation of heaters machinery and electrical appliances including office equipment.
 - (h) Inadequate cleaning of work areas and poorly maintained equipment.
 - (i) Inadequate supervision of cooking and other work activities.
 - (j) Carelessness by contractors or maintenance workers.
 - (k) Waste oil / petrol drums not stored properly.
 - (l) Using cutting / grinding equipment around or near waste or other flammables.

List of Fire Precautions

The individual responsible for fire safety (the occupier, owner or manager) should inspect the premises to identify any potential fire hazards. It is then suggested that a list of fire precautions should be drawn up under suitable headings, which may include the following:-

- (a) Electrical equipment and installations.
- (b) Smoking and the provision of ashtrays.
- (c) Kitchens.
- (d) Building and maintenance work.
- (e) Combustible rubbish and waste.
- (f) Furniture and furnishings these should be to current BS standards.

Electrical Equipment

All staff should be instructed in the correct use of electrical equipment, in the recognition of faults and in how to report faults to supervisors. The use of multiple adapters in electrical socket outlets and coiled extension leads should be avoided as this may lead to overheating. The occupier/owner should make sure that all, electrical repairs are carried out by a qualified electrician. Avoid using 240Volt power tools when working outside use 110Volt power tools if this is not an option use safety plugs which are fitted with RCD protection.

Smoking and the Provision of Ashtrays

The occupier should have a positive policy regarding smoking which identifies the areas where smoking is permitted. As the careless disposal of smoking materials is one of the main causes of fire, the occupier should ensure that, in areas where they allow smoking, staff have a plentiful supply of ashtrays and these are emptied regularly. Ashtrays should not be emptied into containers, which can be easily ignited, nor should their contents be disposed of with general rubbish. The occupier should not allow smoking in storerooms, kitchens and other utility areas.

Kitchens

The misuse of grill trays, frying pans, deep fat frying equipment and microwave ovens can cause fires. The occupier should therefore ensure that staff are instructed in the correct use of equipment and know how to prevent a fire occurring.

Ideally main electrical switches and gas stopcocks in a kitchen should be positioned on an exit route and be clearly indicated. Switches designed to isolate the extraction fans, in order to prevent flames spreading through extraction systems, should be similarly located. Extraction fans should normally be linked into a fire detection system so that, the fans are automatically closed down in the event of fire.

Building and Maintenance Work

Many serious fires occur during building and maintenance work and any such work should therefore be closely supervised. In larger and complex premises a hot work permit system should be used. The occupier should ensure that any location where hot work (such as welding or using a blow lamp or torch) is to take place is examined to make sure that all material which could be easily ignited has either been removed or has been suitably protected against heat and sparks. Suitable extinguishers should be readily available. Any areas where hot work is undertaken should be frequently inspected during the first 30 minutes after the work is completed, and again 30 minutes later to ensure that materials are not smouldering.

Hazardous substances such as flammable adhesives, cleaning materials and paints should be securely stored in a well-ventilated area and when not in use kept separate from other materials. When using flammable adhesives and cleaning fluid, rooms should be well ventilated and free from sources of ignition. Gas cylinders should be stored securely outside the building.

At the end of the working day a check should be made to ensure that all flammable substance, combustible material and equipment are safe and that no fires can start accidentally. Special care should be taken when restoring gas and electricity supplies to ensure that equipment has not inadvertently been left switched on.

Combustible Rubbish and Waste

Rubbish should not be stored, even as a temporary measure, in escape corridors, stairways or lobbies. Accumulations of waste should be avoided and all rubbish and waste should be removed at least daily and suitably stored clear of the building.

Furniture and Furnishing

As the fibre and cellular foam fillings in most upholstered furniture can be ignited by smoking materials the occupier should ensure that staff check regularly to make sure that there are no tears or rips which have resulted in the filling material being exposed.

Unoccupied Areas

Parts of the premises which are not normally occupied, such as basements, store rooms and any area where a fire could grow unnoticed should be regularly inspected and kept clear of non-essential flammable substances and combustible materials. Care should also be taken to protect such areas against entry by unauthorised persons.

Checklist

Although fire precautions are mainly common sense, staff need to know what to look for. The occupier, owner, manager or the person responsible for fire safety, should therefore draw up a checklist to ensure that:-

- (a) The means of escape are well sign posted and kept clear of obstruction at all times.
- (b) Internal fire doors are clearly labelled and any self-closing devices are kept in working order.
- (c) All fire exit doors can be easily and immediately opened from the inside without the use of a key.
- (d) There are no obstructions, apparent defects or damage to fire alarm call points, fire detectors or alarm sounders.
- (e) The fire-fighting equipment is in good order, unobstructed and in place.
- (f) All electrical equipment is fitted with fuses of the correct size and type, and that the lengths of flexible cable are kept to the minimum; that cables are run only where damage is unlikely and never under floor coverings, under furniture/equipment or through doorways.
- (g) Materials which could readily catch fire is not left near to a source of heat.
- (h) Flammable substances or combustible materials are suitably located and kept in appropriate quantities.
- (i) There are adequate facilities for the disposal of smoking materials.
- (j) All furnishings are in good condition.
- (k) There is no accumulation of rubbish, waste paper or other materials which could catch fire. (Such a check is particularly important when part of the premises has been used for a seminar or exhibition).
- (l) Decorative materials used at festive or social gatherings are not readily ignitable; that decorations are not attached to lights or heaters, and they do not obscure fire safety notices and emergency escape lighting.
- (m) Heating appliances are fixed in position at a safe distance from any combustible materials and are adequately guarded.
- (n) Open fires are protected with fixed guards to prevent the risk of sparks igniting materials in the close vicinity.

Benefits

Although the guidance in this information is about protecting persons from the risk of fire, many of the precautions recommended will also protect the building and its contents whilst the premises are unoccupied.

It is therefore suggested that at the end of the day's activities a full check be carried out to make sure that:

- (a) The building is secured against unauthorised entry.
- (b) All doors are closed, including those held open during the day by automatic door release units; (not fire extinguishers).
- (c) Electrical equipment not in use is switched off and where appropriate, unplugged; (also saving energy).
- (d) Smoking materials are not left smouldering.
- (e) All rubbish and waste is removed.
- (f) All combustible materials and flammable substances are safely stored.

Effective arrangements should be made to ensure that any deficiency found during the checks carried out in accordance with the checklist is speedily rectified.

Staff should be encouraged to bring to any potential fire risk to the attention of supervisors.

The Fire & Rescue Department also recommend that a log be kept with all reported deficiencies and what action has been taken to rectify the problem.