

THE Burning Issue™

KEEPING YOU INFORMED ABOUT FIRE SAFETY LEGISLATION

Managerial requirements: What does this mean?

Ask anyone what is meant by fire precautions. You invariably receive the same answers - extinguishers, doors, alarm systems, etc. Rarely will anyone suggest any aspect of fire safety management. We often regard fire precautions as physical measures, rather than the "soft" issues that comprise "fire safety management".

After a fire disaster, people seek physical shortcomings in building design or fire precautions as the proximate cause; they are simpler to comprehend than the managerial failures that often lead to ignition, fire development, and in delays in evacuation and summoning the fire and rescue service.

Blindness to the significance of fire safety management can be seen in people's memories of fire tragedies. The Summerland fire, in which 51 people died, is often remembered because of the contribution of the acrylic roof. Less well remembered are the inquiry's findings, such as:

- no overall duty in respect of fire safety
- no staff training in fire safety
- a long delay in summoning the fire brigade
- no organized methodical evacuation
- locked fire exits
- misguided actions by staff
- delay in operating the fire alarm system.

The King's Cross fire and the Bradford stadium fire are both remembered for the contribution of timber (escalators and the stand). Arguably, more important were shortcomings in fire safety management. The committee of inquiry into the King's Cross fire recognized this. In its report, an entire chapter was devoted to management of safety, concluding that no one person was charged with overall responsibility for safety. Equally, both fires were the result of housekeeping issues, namely rubbish or debris in hidden areas.

Such is the significance of fire safety management that an 82 page British Standard is devoted to the subject. BS 5588-12 Managing Fire Safety (available from Homesaver at £110) is essential reading for those with responsibility for managing fire safety.

Fire legislation and its enforcement now recognize the importance of fire safety management. Many requirements of fire legislation concern managerial measures. The legislation imposes a general duty to manage fire safety properly, while enforcing authorities, in "policing" the legislation, focus on the standard of fire safety management.

Most physical fire precautions have been considered in past issues of Burning Issues. Future issues will concentrate on a number of specific managerial issues. In the meantime, we conclude this issue with the key components in managing fire safety in any building. These comprise:

- (a) a documented and periodically reviewed fire risk assessment
- (b) a documented fire safety manual, setting out the building's fire precautions.

Continued Overleaf

