

# THE Burning Issue™

KEEPING YOU INFORMED ABOUT FIRE SAFETY LEGISLATION

## Means of Escape - Why is it so important?

**Means of escape from fire are fundamental to safety of life, and must be planned at an early stage in the design of a building.**

**The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order requires means of escape that will ensure the safety of employees so far as reasonably practicable, and that may reasonably be required in the circumstances to ensure that the premises are safe for people who are not employees.**

Article 14 of the Fire Safety Order makes quite specific requirements in respect of means of escape. These are that, where necessary:

- Exit routes and exits themselves are kept clear at all times;
- Emergency routes and exits must lead as directly as possible to a place of safety
- In the event of danger, it must be possible for persons to evacuate the premises as quickly and safely as possible;
- The number and dimensions of emergency routes and exits must be adequate;
- Emergency doors must open in the direction of escape;
- Sliding or revolving doors must not be used for exits specifically intended as emergency exits;
- Emergency doors must not be so locked or fastened that they cannot be easily and immediately opened by any person who may require to use them in an emergency.

A number of points should be noted in respect of these requirements. Firstly, and most importantly, the requirements are not absolute; they need to be implemented "where necessary".

The "necessity" is determined by a fire risk assessment. Thus, for example, it is not the case that all fire exits in all premises need to open in the direction of escape. While this might be essential for doors used by the public in a theatre, in many workplaces it might only be necessary if the door is likely to be used by more than around 60 people. Similarly, a sliding door might be acceptable on an escape route that will only ever be used by a few trained employees.

*Continued overleaf*

