

RELEVANT PERSONS

The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (and equivalent legislation in Scotland) differs from the now repealed Fire Precautions (Workplace) Regulations in that, whereas the latter Regulations were intended to ensure the safety of employees from fire, the new legislation is designed to protect both employees and "relevant persons" who are not employees.

So who are relevant persons? The legislation provides a definition. Relevant persons are:

(a) any person (including the responsible person) who is or may be lawfully on the premises; and

(b) any person in the immediate vicinity of the premises who is at risk from a fire on the premises.

Relevant persons do not, however, include fire-fighters dealing with a fire or other emergency. It should also be noted that only those lawfully on the premises are protected by the legislation. Also, anyone outside the premises must be in the immediate vicinity to come within the scope. ■

Trading Tip!

Means of escape is a huge topic on its own - and your customer may well be looking for advice. Make sure that you can respond by giving them the facts - you never know, new doors may be opened to you!

The requirement for it to be possible to escape as quickly and as safely as possible is arguably the key requirement. If there is some deficiency in the means of escape, it can hardly be argued that there has been compliance with this requirement.

However, the Fire Safety Order has not changed the principles of fire safety. Traditionally, the two key factors in the design of means of escape were *travel distance* and *exit capacity*. Travel distance is the maximum distance that must be travelled to reach a storey exit; limits on travel distance have always been given in codes. This limitation on travel distance is simply to ensure that it is indeed possible to evacuate quickly and safely, by limiting people's exposure to any fire.

Similarly, guidance traditionally given on the number and widths of exits has intended to ensure that the entire population of a storey can pass through the available exits from that storey in a given time (typically 2.5 minutes), even if, where there is more than one exit, one exit is unavailable as a result of the fire.

Traditionally, guidance on means of escape was applied in a prescriptive and somewhat rigid matter. The modern approach is that matters such as limitations on travel distance should be applied flexibly. The key question is whether people can escape from the building before a fire poses a threat to their safety. Thus, means of escape should not be considered in isolation from other fire precautions. Measures for detecting fire and for limiting fire development also need to be taken into account. ■