Albion Mercer

A FREE GUIDE FROM ALBION MERCER

Fire Safety for Shops & Offices

A practical guide for business owners, employers, landlords and managing agents

Workplace precautions, shared buildings and your responsibilities explained.



For premises in England

November 2026

Who looks after fire safety in your workplace?

Fire safety is part of running the premises. The arrangements need to protect staff, customers, contractors and others who may be affected.

Does a small business need an FRA?

Shops and offices covered by the Fire Safety Order must have a suitable fire risk assessment (FRA). Keep a full written assessment and a record of how you manage fire safety. This applies even if you employ fewer than five people.

Who is the Responsible Person?

The employer is normally the Responsible Person for a workplace they control. A landlord, owner or managing agent may also have duties for the areas, equipment or management arrangements they control.

What do you need to do?

Identify the risks, provide suitable safety measures and plan how everyone will leave in a fire. Maintain the equipment and train staff in what to do. Arrange any work identified by the assessment.

Can someone in the business carry out the assessment?

A person with enough knowledge and experience may be able to assess simple premises using official guidance. More complex layouts, mixed uses or uncertainty about fire precautions are good reasons to seek competent help.

Agree responsibilities with your landlord.

Check the lease, agree who looks after each area and system, and share relevant information. Legal duties also depend on who controls the premises.

Check stores, kitchens and service areas.

Stockrooms, kitchens, service cupboards and rear yards can introduce risks that are easy to overlook during a busy working day.

Electrical equipment

Remove damaged equipment, avoid overloaded sockets and keep installations and appliances maintained.

Stock & packaging

Keep cardboard and other combustible storage away from heaters, electrical equipment and escape routes.

Staff kitchens

Keep cooking appliances clean and maintained. Place heaters safely, clear of paper, packaging and other combustible items.

Charging batteries

Choose suitable locations for charging. Damaged lithium batteries and charging in escape routes need particular attention.

Waste & security

Control rubbish and external bins. Keep waste away from the building and secure bins where needed to reduce arson risk.

Contractor work

Control welding and other hot work, temporary wiring, and work affecting fire doors, walls or floors that resist fire spread.

Changes can alter the risk

Different stock, extra storage, a mezzanine or a changed office layout can affect escape routes and fire safety equipment. Consider fire safety before making changes.

> **Include the whole premises in your checks.**
>
> Check stores, service rooms, outside routes and areas that are rarely used.

Make sure people can raise the alarm and leave.

The right precautions depend on the building and its use. A small ground-floor shop and an office above another business may need different arrangements.

Escape routes & exits

Keep routes clear whenever people are present, including early or late working. Make sure escape doors can be opened immediately from inside without a key.

Raising the alarm

Make sure people can raise the alarm and everyone at risk can receive the warning. Maintain any fire detection and alarm system the building needs.

Fire doors, walls & floors

Check that fire doors close properly and arrange repairs to damaged doors or faulty closers. Have gaps around pipes and cables through fire-resisting walls or floors checked and sealed where needed. Do not wedge fire doors open.

Lighting, signs & equipment

Provide suitable emergency lighting, escape information and firefighting equipment where needed. Keep them visible, accessible and maintained.

Check arrangements for a shared staircase

Find out how an alarm in one area affects others, who checks the common routes and whether work in another unit could affect your escape.

Do you need a detailed fire-door inspection?

A separate inspection can help if the FRA raises concerns about doors or you need a list of repairs for each door. You still need routine checks and maintenance.

> **Fire safety needs to work whenever anyone is on site.**
>
> Check that security measures and out-of-hours arrangements do not prevent escape.

Agree responsibilities. Prepare staff for a fire.

Responsibility is often shared between the business, the landlord and a managing agent. Gaps in those arrangements can leave important tasks undone.

Agree responsibilities in writing

Agree who maintains shared alarms, emergency lighting, fire doors and escape routes. Share contact details and relevant fire risks with the other people responsible for the building. Keep a written record of what each party looks after.

Plan how everyone will leave

Explain the alarm signal, escape routes, assembly point and who calls the emergency services. Give staff clear roles and arrange cover when someone is absent.

Include people who need assistance

Consider disabled staff, visitors and customers. Agree individual plans where needed, and make sure you can help visitors whose needs are not known beforehand. Do not rely on fire crews to carry out the planned evacuation.

Train and practise

Give staff relevant fire safety instruction when they start, refresh it as needed and practise the emergency plan. Include temporary staff and anyone working different hours. Use drills and any incidents to check whether the plan needs improving.

Check that your own shop or office has been assessed.

An assessment of shared areas may not cover your shop or office. Check that the assessments together cover your workplace, shared escape routes and risks affecting neighbours.

Keep fire safety checks up to date.

Regular checks and servicing help keep people safe between assessments. Record faults and make sure repairs are completed.

When opening the premises

Look for blocked exits, obstructions, damaged doors and obvious equipment faults. Include rear escape routes and any external gates.

Routine tests

Fire alarm systems with manual call points normally need weekly tests by someone who knows how to use them. Emergency lighting normally needs a monthly check that it works when the normal power is switched off.

Professional servicing

Use suitable contractors to service fire safety equipment. Emergency lighting normally also needs an annual test to check it works for its full rated duration. Follow each system's maintenance schedule.

When should the FRA be reviewed?

Review it regularly, and sooner if there is a fire or a significant change to the layout, use or people using the premises. Review it too if you have reason to think it is out of date.

Is a new assessment required every year?

A completely new assessment is not automatically required every year. How often it needs reviewing, and how much work that involves, depends on the premises and the risks.

Record faults and arrange repairs.

Keep service reports and records or photographs of completed repairs. Agree who will arrange outstanding work and by when, and deal promptly with urgent safety concerns.

What do you receive from an assessment?

We look at the building and how your business uses it. Your report explains what needs attention and helps you plan the work.

01 **Agree what the visit covers**

Tell us how the building is used, how many people use it, the number of floors and any shared areas or known concerns. We confirm which areas we need to see.

02 **During the visit**

The assessor checks accessible areas, looks for fire hazards and asks how you manage fire safety. We also look at the relevant records you have available.

03 **Receive your report**

Your written report explains what was assessed, any problems found and the recommended work, with priorities and timescales. It also identifies areas we could not inspect or that need further investigation.

What other checks might be needed?

Electrical inspections, equipment servicing and specialist surveys remain separate. We do not normally open up the building during an FRA, so hidden construction may need further investigation.

What if work is needed?

Deal promptly with urgent risks to safety. Agree who will arrange other work and by when. Obtain any necessary approvals, keep records of completed work and involve the landlord where their areas are affected.

> **Clear findings make it easier to instruct the right contractor.**
>
> Ask for clarification if a recommendation or its priority is unclear.

A short checklist for businesses and agents

A little preparation helps the assessor understand the premises and how the business operates.

- Address, type of business, number of floors, usual number of people and working hours.
- Access to work areas, stockrooms, service rooms and escape routes.
- Details of the landlord, managing agent and shared fire precautions.
- Previous FRA, outstanding actions and available plans.
- Electrical Installation Condition Report (EICR), plus alarm, lighting, extinguisher and fire-door records, if available.
- Training, drill and evacuation records, plus any known defects or alterations.

Further information

These government guides explain your responsibilities and the precautions your workplace may need. They also cover keeping written assessments, looking after shared premises and helping people who need assistance to escape.

01 / Fire safety risk assessment: offices and shops

02 / Making your small non-domestic premises safe from fire

03 / Workplace fire safety: responsibilities and evacuation

04 / Fire Safety Order 2005 (as amended)

05 / Written assessments and shared responsibilities

06 / Means of escape for disabled people

Sources checked 22 October 2026. General information for premises in England. Requirements depend on the property and its use; this guide does not replace a property-specific FRA.

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ABOUT ALBION MERCER

Fire safety advice for your workplace

Albion Mercer provides fire risk assessments, fire-door inspections and practical fire safety advice for businesses, property owners and managing agents. We assess the premises and how they are used, then report the findings in clear, practical terms.

EXPERIENCE & CREDENTIALS

Lead assessor Ian Munro-Price has more than 25 years of property-industry experience. He is listed on the National Fire Risk Assessors Register (NFRAR) and is an Associate Member of the Institute of Fire Safety Managers.

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Serving Dorset, South Somerset, Hampshire and surrounding areas

This guide provides general information for premises in England and is not a substitute for a property-specific fire risk assessment. Requirements depend on the building, its use and the people at risk. Official sources are linked on page 8. Sources checked 22 October 2026. Text updated 2 November 2026. Cover image is an AI-generated illustration.