



Fire Safety during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak

Fire safety for business and premises owners should be a priority at this time, while following government guidance to protect against the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19).

Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service can support you, if you have any concerns or questions about fire safety in your premises, contact our Fire Safety Protection team Fire.BusinessSupport@suffolk.gov.uk

FIRE RISK ASSESSMENTS

If you have made significant changes at your premises to control the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19), these should be identified and recorded in your Fire Risk Assessments.

Fire Risk Assessments should be reviewed frequently at the moment. Here are some questions to consider:

- **Risk Reduction:** Have you taken all reasonable measures to reduce the risk of fire? e.g. isolating all non-essential equipment and machinery
- **Fire alarm systems:** Is your fire alarm system in a good working order? Ensure it is still tested regularly.
- **Interim measures:** If you have had to implement some interim measures do all your staff know and understand why and what they are?
- **New or emerging risk:** Has risk changed? Have things been put in place as a response to the situation that have, on reflection, increased fire risk? (e.g. introduction of oxygen use / storage)
- **Vulnerable people:** Are the most vulnerable receiving support and are Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans (PEEPS) being conducted and reviewed to assess individual needs/ changes in their vulnerability? Who is caring for the vulnerable and can they still maintain it?

EVACUATION PLAN

All staff, residents and visitors must be familiar with the evacuation plan (including all temporary and bank staff).

Maintaining minimum staffing levels to undertake the evacuation plan is very important. Where appropriate, PEEPS must continue to be conducted and reviewed.

FIRE ALARM ACTUATION AND EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

Here is a suggested emergency procedure to follow, which will reduce disruption and minimise the need for visitors to enter your premises.

This is important to protect those you may be shielding (e.g. in a care home setting), and to protect visitors (e.g. firefighters) from potentially exposing themselves to coronavirus (COVID-19)

- If the fire alarm activates, commence your normal emergency procedures.
- Suitably trained staff should investigate the source of the alarm seeking to establish if it is a fire or a false alarm.
- If, at any point during the investigation a fire is discovered or there is a smell of burning or smoke that cannot be accounted for, dial 999 and ask for the fire service immediately – stating that an evacuation is in progress.
- If, following the investigation, you are certain that there is no fire, and no suspicion of a fire, then the emergency procedures can be cancelled. Under these circumstances, do not call the fire service, unless your system is monitored by a 3rd party.
- The fire alarm system should be reset by a competent member of staff and the fire alarm log book updated with a record of the event
- Please ensure that any known problems causing false fire alarms are immediately corrected. This gives confidence that if a fire alarm does occur, it is likely to be genuine.

FIRE ALARM SYSTEMS

Fire alarms, emergency lighting and other fire safety systems must continue to be tested and maintained in good working order.

You may wish to delay the maintenance of your systems by a qualified engineer, to limit the number of visitors to your premises and prevent the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19).

If you delay this maintenance work, you must record it as a significant finding in the Fire Risk Assessment. You must continue to regularly test your systems.

If you are uncertain whether maintenance schedules can safely be extended for the systems in your premises, contact a qualified fire safety system engineer.

FIRE DOORS

We strongly advise against wedging open fire doors and asks responsible persons to consider other control measures.

We are aware that some building users are wedging open self-closing fire doors as a coronavirus (COVID-19) control measure, to reduce the need to touch locks and door handles, etc. Whilst this is understandable, it is essential that this hazard is balanced against the risk of uncontrolled spread of fire and smoke when a fire occurs.

If you have decided to wedge fire doors, this must be fully considered in the fire risk assessment. Suitable control measures must be put in place to ensure fire doors will be closed when needed (particularly in buildings providing sleeping accommodation or care for the vulnerable).

BUILDINGS NOT IN USE

If your building is temporarily closed there are some simple measures to safeguard against both accidental and deliberate fires:

- Isolate utilities and machinery that are not required – but ensure your security/fire alarms are still operative.
- Close all fire doors
- Don't store combustible materials against the building and consider other measures to prevent arson
- Where possible ask your local community to help keep an eye on your premises

BLOCKS OF FLATS, HOUSES IN MULTIPLE OCCUPATION AND STUDENT ACCOMMODATION

Fire safety within dwellings is an especially important at this time, especially in mixed use premises and those where unrelated occupiers, share common areas of the same building.

Any change of strategy needs constant review and robust management.

Key considerations should be:

- Ensure that safety systems (e.g. fire alarm and smoke control) are in good working order, are being tested appropriately and are maintained well.
- Ensure that common areas and means of escape routes are clear from combustible items.
- Ensure refuse compounds and other storage areas are not overflowing and are not stored immediately next to buildings – minimum distance of 6m should be maintained where possible.
- Ensure that all occupiers are familiar with the building's evacuation strategy
- Ensure that all fire safety features are maintained, i.e. fire doors are closed and not wedged open

USEFUL GUIDANCE DOCUMENTS

- [Fire safety advice for residential care providers and those managing 'sleeping risk' premises](#)
- [National Fire Chief's Council Guidance on COVID19 and 'waking watch' premises](#)
- [Detailed guidance documents for different building uses](#)