FIRE PROOFING YOUR BUSINESS

Paul Field

As the long summer nights start to draw in and the temperature starts to drop, it's time to start thinking about the coming winter.

For many schools, businesses and FM companies, winter can be a bit of a nightmare.

From slippery pathways to broken heating, there's usually something to prepare before the cold spell truly hits.

But did you know that the winter months are a prime time for accidental fires too? More than 80% of fires could be prevented with the right actions, so it's important to be prepared.

Whilst it's impossible to make your premises totally fire proof, there are things you can do to reduce your risks and increase your probability of a fast recovery should disaster strike and you find yourself dealing with a fire.

That's why I'm going to share with you our *Top 5 Things You Must Do To Keep Your Business Safe From Fire.*

It's not rocket science and it's not expensive. But it could save you a ton of time and money should your premises be unlucky this winter.

1. DO A WEEKLY FIRE ALARM TEST & RECORD IT

If a fire breaks out and your alarms don't work, the results can be catastrophic.

High losses, insurance penalties and even deaths can occur, so it's understandable that this is top of your list. For most premises having a fully operational fire alarm system is required by law, and regular testing is mandatory.

The government British Standard BS 5839 suggests that weekly testing should be carried out, and this guidance should be followed.

MAKE YOUR FIRE ALARM TEST A PART OF YOUR WEEKLY SCHEDULE.

Try nominating someone to take responsibility for testing and doing it at the same time, on the same day each week, so everyone in your building knows what to expect.

Your alarm tests should be recorded in a fire testing log book too, so you have a firm record of when and by whom the test has been carried out.

Drop us a line on 01277 724779 if you haven't already got one of these and I'll get it sorted.

2. GET ALL SYSTEMS REGULARLY MAINTAINED & SERVICED

If you think there is a problem with your alarm, don't delay in getting it looked at. It might not be the most pressing matter on your to do list,

but you never know when you might need it.

If your alarms aren't functioning properly and you fail to get them maintained, then you could be held responsible should a fire occur and people are not alerted.

Alarms should be regularly serviced to keep them in their best condition. Ideally this should be done twice per year, but be sure to arrange this in advance.

Your fire safety should be a priority, not a task to deal with just when you get the time.

And make sure you choose a reputable maintenance and repair company for your works.

Fire safety is not the place to cut corners or cut costs. Opt for a company with a solid reputation and experienced engineers, so you can be certain your alarms are well maintained.

3. KEEP YOUR FIRE RISK ASSESSMENT UP TO DATE

Your fire risk assessment is the key to good fire safety. It shows you exactly where your fire risks lay and estimates the consequences should a fire occur.

All non-domestic premises must carry out a fire risk assessment by law and current guidelines say that it should be updated periodically.

This is a little open to interpretation, but we recommend you update your fire risk assessment annually, or sooner if any changes have been made to the building or environment.

Whilst you don't have to be qualified to carry out a fire risk assessment, if you choose to carry out the assessment yourself you are fully responsible for any outcomes. Hiring a professional means this responsibility is shared. See the article opposite on how to choose a professional you can trust.

4. PAT TEST ALL ELECTRICAL EQUIPMENT ANNUALLY

Portable appliance testing is a legal

requirement for non-domestic premises. All electrical appliances should be tested by an engineer and must carry a PAT test "passed" sticker to show their compliance.

A full certificate of all "passed" and "failed" items will be given to you for your records.

Make sure your PAT test is carried out on time and be certain to replace any items that fail, regardless of how new, expensive or useful they are.

New items, under 12 months old and showing no signs of damage are exempt from testing, but it's usually best to test them too. Otherwise, by the time your next test comes around, you'll have missed their required testing date.

Whilst we don't offer PAT testing as a service, we can recommend a few trusted professional that we use. Many of these PAT testing businesses book up far in advance, so be sure to schedule yours in a few months before the due date to stay up to date.

5. CHECK YOUR MONITORING COMPANY ACTUALLY RECEIVE YOUR ALARM TEST REPORTS

If you do have fire alarm monitoring in place, be sure to check the monitoring company do receive your alarm test reports every time you carry out a test.

Your alarm may seem to function fine at your end, but the message may be getting lost along the way.

After all, if they don't receive your signal in an emergency then they can't call in the fire brigade and with fires, a few lost minutes can be the difference between a small fire and a disaster.

So that's it, your guide to protecting yourself from accidental fires in your business this winter.

I hope you found it useful, and don't hesitate to reach out if you need any guidance!

Paul
Paul Field
MD

FIRE ALARM TESTING JUST GOT EASIER

As you already know, you should always carry out a weekly fire alarm test in the building of your business or organisation.

However, there's a lot to remember and we understand that it can often feel like a bit of a chore, especially when you have loads of other things to do.

First, you need to notify your Alarm Receiving Centre (ARC), next you need to make all employees and visitors aware and then you are required to obtain a concluding report on findings from the ARC.

And that's not even considering the reporting element.

OUR HANDY LOGBOOK

Here at WFP Fire & Security, we care about keeping people safe and making the whole fire alarm testing scenario as stress-free as possible.

Our new and improved logbook is going to be available very soon and is designed to give you a simple and transparent means to stay compliant.

It saves you time producing a spreadsheet and has every area you need to consider on a weekly basis when carrying out a fire alarm test. This should, in theory, save you valuable time spent researching what kind of things you need to check in order for your building to be classed as safe by authorities.

These logbooks also contain handy snippets of advice on how to stay compliant, factors to look out for and other relevant information which you'd struggle to find elsewhere.

It's an added peace of mind provided by fire safety specialists and a simple way to make the whole process easier.

As we care about the wellbeing of people, we offer this logbook free of charge to our customers and at a small cost of £15 to anyone else. Get in touch to get yours today.

For more practical ways to streamline your fire safety procedures in your business or organisation, feel free to get in touch with us here at WFP Fire & Security on 01277 724653.

CHOOSING A FIRE CONTRACTOR
HOW TO TELL THE GOOD FROM THE BAD

When it comes to choosing a contractor to manage your business, organisation or school's fire alarm systems, it's important to get it right.

If you fail to source the right one, you could be putting the lives of many students, employees and visitors at risk.

In fact, here at WFP Fire and Security, we recently came across a school who had unintentionally made this very mistake.

A RISKY BUSINESS

Just last month, our team were called by a building contractor to assess and rewire a school's current fire alarm system.

Back in the 1980s, the British standards required sounder/warning circuits to be wired in fire-related cable – normally MICC type. Whereas the zone circuits could be wired in a non-fire-rated cable (typically standard twin and earth cable).

However, these rules changed back in the 1990s and now all cable has to be fire-rated.

While the school's old wires and the system would have met the standards at the time of installation, they were no longer legal.

The worrying factor is that the school's previous contractors must have purposely or inadvertently hidden this fact.

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This old wiring was hidden inside the wall cavity and extended into the fire alarm panel using a fire-rated cable to give the impression that it's still compliant!

USING THE WRONG KIND OF CABLE CAN IMPACT THE WAY IT WORKS WHEN IT'S EXPOSED TO FIRE, MAKING IT EXTREMELY DANGEROUS IN EMERGENCY SITUATIONS.

So it's up to you whether you want to risk the safety and reputation of your business, organisation or school for the sake of a slight extra cost for fire-rated cables.

Our Advice: use an accredited fire and security company who will follow the standards.

The question is: how can you tell if your current or potential fire contractor is actually reliable and good at what they do?

To help answer these questions, we've put together a few key indicators to look out for before putting pen to paper.

3 THINGS TO LOOK FOR IN A FIRE ALARM COMPANY.

Whether you're committed to a fire alarm company or on the hunt for a new one, it's still essential to know what you should be looking for.

Especially when so many contractors are making silly mistakes or hiding the facts from their clients.

FIRSTLY, YOU SHOULD ALWAYS GO FOR A FIRE CONTRACTOR WHO IS BRITISH APPROVALS FOR FIRE EQUIPMENT (BAFE) APPROVED.

In a way, this is kind of like a thumbs up from the authorities to say that someone or a company is legit and knows what they are doing.

SECONDLY, TAKE YOUR TIME TO LOOK AT THEIR WEBSITE AND SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS FOR TESTIMONIALS.

If they have a date included, you should discard any posted three or more years ago, as you want a contractor who is relevant and reliable now, not previously.

AND FINALLY, A GOOD FIRE CONTRACTOR SHOULD ALWAYS CONDUCT A PROPER SITE SURVEY.

This means they can make it clear and simple for you to understand what you need and why.

If they don't do one, you have to ask yourself whether they are thorough enough at their job.

It's also an early sign that the fire contractor is willing to cut corners, just like the example we found at the school.

For more guidance on choosing the right contractor for your business, organisation or school, get in touch with our team on 01277 724779 today.

SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS AND WE'LL DONATE £3 TO CHARITY

Here at WFP we truly understand the value of your feedback - it's the reason we ask for it so often!

Not because we love hearing how amazing we are - although, it is lovely to hear - it's so we can continually improve the service we provide to you as a customer. But we know how busy things can get for you, which is why we want to offer an extra incentive to tell us what you think.

That's why when we receive feedback, we'll donate £3 to charity on your behalf.

We've raised over £300 through your feedback so far, so why not head over to www.ReviewWFP.com and leave us your review today?