No BS Fact Sheet No. 12

Means of Escape

Once a fire has started, been detected and a warning given, everyone in your premises should be able to escape to a place of total safety unaided and without the help of the fire and rescue service. However, some people with disabilities and others with special needs may need help from staff who will need to be designated for the purpose. Escape routes should be designed to ensure, as far as possible, that any person confronted by fire anywhere in the building, should be able to turn away from it and escape to a place of reasonable safety, e.g. a protected stairway. From there they will be able to go directly to a place of total safety away from the building.

Risk Assessment: An Overview

When considering the likely consequences of fire, the fire risk assessment needs to take into account the effects of fire on escape routes; considering how quickly fire could be detected, how quickly it may grow; how it could affect the escape routes; and how quickly people in the building are likely to respond to an alarm.

In general, adequate means of escape are provided if people can immediately, or within a short distance of travel, turn their back on any fire and move away from it to a final exit along smoke-free escape routes.

It is important to consider how many people will use the escape route and make arrangements for disabled or elderly people. The escape route should be as short as possible and the impact of a blocked escape route must be considered. Emergency lighting and escape route signage should be installed and all employees must be informed and trained in how to escape the building.

What things should be considered when assessing means of escape?

There are several critical factors in the assessment of means of escape:

- ❑ Maximum distance occupants must travel to reach a place of relative or ultimate safety such as an exit to a protected stairway or final exit
- ❑ Avoidance of long dead ends in which escape is only possible in one direction
- ❑ Number, distribution and width of storey exits and final exits
- ❑ Means of protecting the escape routes from ingress or build up of smoke that might prevent occupants escaping
- ❑ Ability of occupants to use escape routes especially arrangements for those with disabilities

Escape Route Suitability: A Checklist

You should ensure that your escape routes are:

- ❑ Suitable;
- ❑ Easily, safely and immediately usable at all times;
- ❑ Adequate for the number of people likely to be use them;
- ❑ Generally usable without passing through doors requiring a key or code to unlock, or with low level manual over-rides for metal roller shutter doors;
- ❑ Free from any obstructions, slip or trip hazards;
- ❑ Well lit by normal or emergency escape lighting; and
- ❑ Available for access by the emergency services

In multi-occupied premises, escape routes should normally be independent of other occupiers, i.e. people should not have to go through another occupier's premises as the route may be secured or obstructed. Where this is not possible, then robust legal agreements should be in place to ensure their availability at all times.

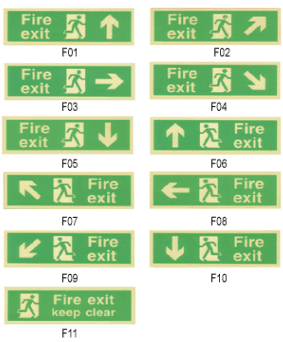
All doors on escape routes should open in the direction of the escape and ideally be fitted with a safety vision panel. This is particularly important if more than 60 people are expected to use them at any time or they provide an exit from an area of high fire risk.

At least two exits should be provided if a room/area is to be occupied by more than 60 persons. This number of 60 can be varied in proportion to the risk, for a lower risk there can be a slight increase, for a higher risk, lower numbers of persons should be allowed.

Travel distance

Having established the number and location of people and the exit capacity required to evacuate them safely, it needs to be confirmed that the number and location of existing exits is adequate.

The table overleaf shows suggested range of travel distances. It should be understood that these distances are flexible and may be increased or decreased depending upon the level of risk the appropriate fire-prevention measures have been put in place.



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Travel distance

Escape Routes	Suggested Range of Travel Distance
Where more than one escape route is provided	25m in higher fire-risk area[1,2] 45m in normal fire-risk area 60m in lower fire risk area[3]
Where only a single escape route is provided	12m in higher fire-risk area[1,2] 25m in normal fire-risk area 45m in lower fire risk area[3]

Note 1 – Where there are small higher-risk areas this travel distance should apply. Where the risk assessment indicates that the whole building is higher risk, seek advice.

Note 2 – some rooms are considered as places of special fire hazard, e.g. rooms used for highly flammable paint spraying. Shorter travel distances are then generally required

Note 3 – The travel distance for lower risk premises should only be applied in exceptional cases in the very lowest risk premises where densities are low, occupants are familiar with the premises, excellent visual awareness, and very limited combustibles.

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