

Fire safety is important for the wellbeing of businesses and other organisations in Guernsey – in fact, it's important for us all, says Gosha chairman **Andrew Mills**



Fire safety: a burning issue

FIRE safety is something we should all be concerned about. You only have to recall the Octopus restaurant fire in 2024 to realise the serious effects of fire. Thankfully, no one was injured in that fire but the damage was catastrophic and had the restaurant been filled with customers and staff when the fire broke out, the consequences could have been devastating. As it is, the interruption to the business has been significant. The financial cost is great and the emotional costs to the owners and staff will be great too.

We want to know that the risk of fire outbreak has been controlled and mitigated in premises we use and visit – that's a reassuring feeling. Fire safety, truly, is a critical aspect of workplace health and safety and to the ongoing wellbeing of our island.

The current fire service law in Guernsey for businesses is based on the Fire Services (Guernsey) Law, 1989. This law outlines the requirements for fire safety and prevention in businesses, including the need for fire risk assessment, fire alarms and emergency plans. Supplementing this law is the Fire Safety (Guernsey) Ordinance, 2012 and the Guernsey Technical Standard also from 2012 (with updates since). Together, they form Guernsey's core fire safety legislation, drawing on UK standards for consistency while addressing local needs. You can find the details on gov.gg.

Among the provisions specified, the law states that employers must endeavour to prevent fires and ensure the safe evacuation of employees and others if a fire should occur.

And there is a more general health and safety ordinance which makes clear employer and employee duties and responsibilities in the workplace – to keep people safe and healthy (the Health And Safety At Work (General) (Guernsey) Ordinance 1987).

As you will be aware, fires in workplaces can have serious consequences including:

- Injuries, some being lifelong, and, sometimes, death;
- lots of damage to property, possessions, keepsakes, furniture, furnishings and equipment;
- adverse consequences for business operations and adverse emotional consequences for people affected;
- lots of direct and indirect financial loss, including fines and compensation;
- damage to a good business reputation, which is so important in achieving business success. And that is something which generally cannot be insured.

The Fire Safety law in Guernsey has been designed to apply to all workplaces, including charities and not-for-profit organisations, and requires employers to:

- Conduct a fire risk assessment of their business, including its premises (you can see a helpful risk assessment template at hse.gov.uk (search risk assessment template within that website);
- Implement fire safety measures, such

as installing fire alarms and extinguishers;

- Develop a fire evacuation plan;
- Provide training to employees on fire safety and evacuation procedures;
- Review and update fire safety measures regularly (and don't forget the special needs of those who have a disability).

Workplaces should all have a fire safety plan, which should include:

- Fire risk assessment to identify potential fire hazards and assess the risk of a fire occurring;
- Fire safety measures in place to prevent or mitigate the effects of fires, such as fire alarms, extinguishers and the use of fire-resistant materials (your insurer may offer guidance, especially if your premises has combustible composite panels, found especially in premises handling food);
- Fire evacuation plan developed for evacuating the workplace in the event of a fire, including emergency exits, assembly points and roll calls. And, again, don't forget the special needs of disabled people in your planning;
- Training provided to employees on fire safety and evacuation procedures. Appoint fire marshals and train them accordingly – St John provide training, see stjohntraining.gg/product/fire-marshal-2026;
- Regular review and updates for fire safety measures to ensure they remain effective.

Employees also have a role to play in fire safety:

- Familiarise yourself with the fire evacuation plan and emergency exits;
- Report any fire hazards or concerns to your employer;
- Participate in fire drills and training sessions;
- Follow fire safety procedures and use fire extinguishers correctly (ask for training, if needed);
- Some employees need special training to help them discharge their responsibilities, such as fire marshals (see below);
- If you have a disability which could hinder your safe exit, please ensure that special procedures are in place to assist you.

Fire Safety Tips – the basics for our workplaces:

- Ensure emergency exits are accessible and clearly marked and are not blocked (especially by rubbish or other objects);
- Keep fire doors closed to prevent the spread of fire but ensure they can be easily opened from the inside to help people to escape in the event of fire (or other emergency);
- Fit a fire alarm (to British Standard) – see guidance at gov.gg;
- Use fire extinguishers correctly and train people how to use them. There is no hard and fast rule but at least two class A (water/foam) extinguishers should be sited on each floor. For larger premises, it is recommended to fit one every 200 square metres of floor space and no person should be more than 30m from a fire extinguisher. The extinguishers fitted should be appropriate to how the building is used e.g. offices

need different protection to kitchens/workshops/laundries. All extinguishers must be checked and maintained by competent individuals at least every 12 months. For electrical fires, use carbon dioxide (CO2) fire extinguishers sited no more than 10m from the electrical equipment. Your fire risk assessment will help you to determine what is needed and where. Extinguishers should be fixed to a wall or should be sited on an appropriate stand;

- If you use gas, please read the Gas Safety Advice produced by the HSE on gov.gg;

- Report any fire hazards or concerns to your employer;

- Ensure combustible waste is kept in fire proof bins, is emptied when full and is, ideally, stored away from buildings (at least 10m). Your insurer is likely to make specific requirements for unoccupied buildings and other high hazard buildings/uses (such as kitchens);

- Arrange fire drills and training sessions;

- Appoint fire marshals and give them appropriate training and marked, fluorescent vests so that they are easily identified during a drill or an emergency;

- Make premises smoking free but where smoking is to be permitted outside buildings, make sure it is away from the building, provide fire resistant receptacles for smoking materials, encourage smokers not to stub out smoking materials on the ground or near doorways where they could easily be taken into a building on someone's shoe while still hot/alight (and lead to a fire);

- Store highly combustible stock in appropriate fire resistant containers/cupboards and clearly mark the contents;

- Clear combustible waste frequently and remove it from the premises or store it away from the buildings (ideally in enclosed, fire resistant bins, at least 10 metres away);

- Ensure all electrical equipment and the electrics within buildings are inspected regularly – every five years for buildings (or at the change of a tenancy, if within five years), annually for portable electrical equipment, and more frequent inspections are recommended for high-risk locations, including building sites (every three to six months). Electrical inspections should be undertaken by a competent, professionally qualified person.

Specific additional thought needs to be given for different types of workplaces. For example, for construction sites fire safety provisions contained in the Guernsey Construction Approved Code of Practice 2020 should be followed.

Every workplace should have a fire risk assessment undertaken to identify specific issues, weaknesses, hazards and measures to be implemented to keep everyone safe. For example, people with disabilities may face unique challenges in the event of a fire. Here are some thoughts in this regard:

- Think about the issues in evacuating a disabled person including those who are

deaf or blind;

- Ensure that assistance is available to help individuals with disabilities evacuate the building (for example, you may need to fit evacuation equipment to help them evacuate via stairways);

- Ensure that emergency alarms can be seen or heard by individuals with disabilities, such as visual alarms for people who are deaf or hard of hearing;

- Designate a meeting point where individuals with disabilities can gather once they have evacuated the building.

Remember, disabled people and all affected people can include: employees, visitors, customers and neighbours and measures will need to be thought about for each category.

Shared workplaces or multi-tenanted buildings require special consideration when it comes to fire safety. Here are some examples of steps to ensure fire safety in these types of buildings:

- Coordinate fire safety efforts: Ensure that all tenants and employers in the building coordinate their fire safety efforts;

- Share fire safety information: Share fire safety information with all tenants and employers in the building;

- Conduct joint fire drills: Conduct joint fire drills with all tenants and employers in the building;

- Ensure common areas are safe: Ensure that common areas, such as corridors, landings and stairwells are safe and free from fire hazards and obstruction.

In among its other important duties, the Guernsey Fire and Rescue Service is responsible for:

- Enforcement action: If a fire is found to be caused by a breach of fire safety regulations, the Guernsey Fire and Rescue Service can take enforcement action, including issuing fines and prosecuting offenders;

- Fire safety inspections: The Guernsey Fire and Rescue Service conducts fire safety inspections to ensure compliance with fire safety regulations.

Businesses in Guernsey are generally relatively fire safe thanks to the proactive action of many responsible people. But there are so many unique features in Guernsey properties and businesses and so many combustible materials and potentially fire inducing activities that the proper and regular assessment of individual locations and activities are essential to our continued wellbeing. Knowing what to do should a fire break out can limit a fire's spread and the effect it can have.

And so, being aware of the dangers a fire can have, being prepared for an outbreak and remaining vigilant and proactive will prevent future deaths, serious injuries and costly damage, fines, compensation and the adverse consequences of a damaged reputation.

You can contact the Guernsey Fire and Rescue Service on 221111 or email at fire-safety@gov.gg or the Guernsey HSE (gov.gg/hse).

Stay fire safe.