

Briefing Note -

FIRE STRATEGIES



Introduction

As more and more technical considerations are required to manage and quantify the level of fire risk presented within buildings, there is an increasing demand for consultancies like ours to undertake fire strategies. Following client requests, we have produced our latest Briefing Note on the subject.

A fire strategy is the way in which fire safety objectives for a new, altered or existing building are defined and achieved. For new and altered buildings, the fire strategy is usually developed during the design phase of the project.

If the building is already operational, then a fire strategy can be written in order to review the existing fire safety provisions that have been provided for protecting life safety and provide a basis to inform the fire risk assessment process.

A fire strategy could apply to the whole of the building or to a particular part, such as:

- an area where there are extended travel distances;
- specific fire safety systems, such as the provision of an enhanced level of automatic fire detection; or
- a hazard introduced into the building, such as additional retail merchandising units in shopping centres.

In larger modern buildings, it is possible that a fire strategy will have been prepared, and therefore this will need to be referenced as part of the fire risk assessment process. Furthermore, the fire strategy will also need to be reviewed to ensure that the building still complies with that strategy and any alterations have been considered.

A Fire Strategy Will Address

- Fire system design – the method of operation of any life safety systems (i.e. cause and effect).
- Means of escape.
- Fire resistance and compartmentation requirements (internal and external spread).
- Fire safety facilities incorporated into the building to assist the fire services.
- Access / egress / circulation / occupation.
- Fire safety management requirements for the building.

A fire strategy can prove invaluable for due diligence purposes, where requirements for a strategic approach in managing fire risk need to be considered in a wider business context. It is also important that the fire strategy is widely accepted by the business and that the recommendations are adhered to.

Where might a fire strategy be required?

A fire strategy is recommended for all new and existing 'complex' buildings. The definition of a complex building is subjective in many aspects. However, a shopping centre or large commercial building almost certainly falls into this category. The purpose of a fire strategy on an existing complex building is to extend the remit of the statutory Fire Risk Assessment carried out under current legislation.

Circumstances where a fire strategy may be required:

- As part of recruitment process.
- Covered shopping centres.
- In addition, any shopping centres which have internal mall areas, covered atrium, linked fire systems.
- Residential or commercial with floors 30m or higher.
- Large places of assembly.
- Complex buildings.
- Atriums - where the atrium affects compartmentation between storeys.
- Extended travel distances.
- Phased evacuation system in place.
- Building is of "non-standard" design.
- Building layout is such that it may not be easily understood by its occupants.
- Special processes that could lead to an above-average threat of fire.
- In circumstances where the application of management, systems, and procedures could be open to misinterpretation.
- The relationship between fire safety management and other building functions are unclear.

Our Fire Strategy Approach

A good fire strategy should set a clear framework for fire safety and is usually based around showing compliance with the fundamental objectives of the applicable fire safety legislation, business and property protection objectives and insurers' requirements.

Step 1 – Desk Top Review

To prepare for the fire strategy site visit by conducting a desk top audit of all site-specific fire related documentation, including fire engineering reports, fire plans (ideally scalable) and door schedules showing door widths.

Step 2 – Fire Strategy Site Visit

To inspect all relevant areas of the property in order to prepare the fire strategy. Note: This is not a repeat of the fire risk assessment and therefore will not seek to identify specific fire safety hazards and corrective action. The fire strategy will consider broader fire safety management themes and will include these within the fire strategy report.

Step 3 – Fire Strategy Report

The purpose of the report is to set down the fire safety objectives and means by which these objectives for life safety and property protection are delivered at the property. An approach will be adopted in developing the fire strategy document recognising the inter-relationship between all areas and parties.

This document will provide a high-level overview of the fire safety aspects of the fire engineering design that was incorporated into the building in its original (and any subsequent construction phases) conception and the management of fire safety plans/procedures implemented in conjunction with the daily operation of the facility. The fire safety strategy and design of the building may also reflect a multi-occupancy scenario.



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