



News and views from Fire & Security Consultancy Limited

Lives are at risk shocking figures released by FireUK

Ninety percent of small businesses with fewer than 10 employees are failing to conduct appropriate fire-risk assessments or follow basic fire-safety procedures, a survey has revealed.

FireUK, which provides fire-risk assessments across the UK, found that many businesses with members of the public regularly on their premises also have no named responsible person in charge of fire safety.

According to the telephone survey of 580 restaurateurs, publicans, takeaway owners and owners of office-based businesses:

- 90% of all small-business owners were unaware of their responsibility to conduct a fire-risk assessment on their premises
- 86% of business owners with small offices were unaware of this requirement
- 39% of pub landlords were unaware

"We are shocked to the core by these figures," said FireUK spokesperson Mark Hall. "We thought we would find a few companies that fell outside the law, not whole sectors of small businesses playing Russian roulette with people's lives.

"The fact that some pubs don't know the law is terrifying," he continued. "They are playing with fire, quite literally. There's a huge blind spot among business owners who don't know where their responsibilities lie." Ignorance, confusion and neglect

The survey revealed a mixture of ignorance, confusion over the regulations

and sheer, wilful neglect. Some business owners admitted they were unaware that fire safety legislation applied to them, particularly those in smaller rented units who often assumed that the building owners were ultimately responsible instead.

Others thought that safety was a secondary consideration when budgets were tight, while some even put their trust in their staff escaping from a fire on their own initiative.

Among the explanations given by business owners were:

- "We're renting this space. Surely that's not our problem?"
- "I thought it only applies to big companies"
- "We haven't got the money for that kind of thing"
- "We've only got a couple of staff, they'll get out alright"
- "I work from an office at the bottom of my garden. I'm not sure what the law is."

Legal requirements

The law requires that:

- All employers, business owners, or landlords take responsibility for fire safety in the workplace
- The so-called 'responsible person' must carry out fire reviews, identify risks and put

safety measures in place

- Failure to do so can result in fines or even prison sentences

New partnership

Simon Ince, UK strategic alliance and partnership manager at Exova Warrington Certification, is in the early stages of establishing a trade and professional body working group to target individuals who are difficult to engage with over fire safety.

He told IFSEC Global: "It is really useful to see some figures on how big a problem this is. However, the results are no surprise to those who work in fire safety and indeed could be reflected in many different sectors. "The apathy, ignorance and denial factor is well known amongst fire safety professionals, who often end up being called in by the owner of a building after a fire incident or post-enforcement visit to pick up the pieces. "There are many building owners who are not aware of their responsibilities and many who just don't care about fire safety. Compliance saves lives, saves property and saves business.

The fire sector needs to work much harder to engage with, and inform, this group of owners and operators. Hopefully this project will reduce the apathy, ignorance and denial in several high-risk groups.

Publication of Fire Statistics, Great Britain 2012 ~13

Highlights Summary points are as follows:

- Fire and Rescue Authorities in Britain attended 192,600 fires in 2012-13. This is nearly a third fewer than the year before, due to fewer outdoor fires as a result of above average rain-fall.
- While only 12 per cent of dwellings report not having a working smoke alarm in England, more than one third of fires occurred in dwellings in Great Britain where no alarm was installed.
- Three quarters of fire-related fatalities occurred in dwelling fires, the figure fell by 11 per cent (32 deaths) compared to 2011-12.
- Smoker's materials (i.e. cigarettes, cigars or pipe tobacco) have caused the largest share of deaths in dwelling fires, while cooking appliances are the source of ignition in more than half of fires in dwellings.
- Half of fire deaths in buildings that were not dwellings resulted from smoker's material or cigarette lighters.
- The risk of dying in a fire for elderly people (65 and over) is over twice as high as the average for all ages.
- In the year to 2012-13 fire fatalities rates fell by 10% in England and by over 20% in Scotland and Wales. Scotland continued to have a higher rate of fire deaths compared to both England and to Wales.
- Males have higher rates of fire fatality than females, but the gender gap in fire fatality rate narrowed in 2012-13.

Fires where you least expect them

Almost 300 fires of varying intensity have occurred at UK fire stations over the last five years, according to data obtained by the Independent Newspaper.

This ironic toll proves that fire can occur anywhere, at any time, even in the last place it would be expected – a fire station equipped with the latest fire-fighting equipment and manned 24/7.

The figures, obtained through Freedom of Information requests to the UK's 54 fire services, reveal 279 incidents at fire stations and 39 fires on vehicles – an average of nearly six per service. Although many fires were described as minor, some needed dozens of firefighters to extinguish them.

Fires were sparked by domestic appliances including microwaves, dishwashers, vacuum cleaners and toasters as well as by a smouldering cigarette butt, an unattended chip pan and a chair left next to a heater – all circumstances about which the fire service never tires of issuing warnings.

Examples and costs

- A carelessly disposed cigarette caused a blaze at

a Worcester fire station, one of 16 at Hereford and Worcester Fire Service's stations, that was tackled by nine firefighters.

- West Midlands Fire Service, meanwhile, boasts the unenviable record of more incidents than any other service. The 53 incidents included five kitchen fires and six incidents involving fire engines.
- An explosion at Epworth Fire Station in 2011, which needed 24 firefighters to bring under control, cost Humberside Fire and Rescue Service more than £184,000.
- Water jets and breathing apparatus were required to bring two major fires under control on fire brigade property in Northern Ireland, one of which gutted Rathfriland Station in County Down in 2009. It cost almost £712,000 to repair affected buildings, while three fire

engines were also destroyed.

- The national cost of fires in fire stations could run into millions. The combined bill for the 16 brigades that collected data on the incidents amounted to £945,875 – not all of which will be covered by insurance payouts.
- Not included in the data was the destruction of the Downham Market fire station in Norfolk, in March.

Lessons to be learned

Perhaps the figures are less surprising if one considers the nature of a fire station: occupied by many different personnel 24 hours a day, often with shared cooking facilities. And many stations occupy old buildings constructed with little consideration to fire safety and prone to the spread of fire.

It would be interesting to know if the FRSs in the cases above have formally trained personnel for their stations, whether they have a business continuity plan, whether they have done all they could to mitigate the chances of fire starting and spreading, and whether there are any outstanding remedial works to be done from their fire risk assessments.

The bottom line is that fires can start in any building and all building owners should be prepared for this eventuality, even fire stations themselves.

Fire! The risks of hoarding

Hoarding Training and Development Officer at Orbit Independent Living, Samantha Richardson, looks at the fire safety impact on individuals, families and neighbours of increasing levels of compulsive hoarding in both the UK and US:



Recently, I have been speaking with **Catherine Levin**, Correspondent for Fire Magazine, the leading US Fire and Rescue Services magazine. Catherine contacted me as she was researching and writing a comparative piece between the US and UK Fire Service responses to cases of hoarding, in an attempt to identify best practice from 'both sides of the pond'.

The article begins with the story of the Collyer brothers who, in 1947, were found dead in their home amongst 130 tonnes of clutter; including books, furniture, four grand pianos and a model T Ford car - the products of many decades of hoarding. Langley Collyer died from crush injuries after one of his booby traps fell and crushed him. Homer, his older paralysed and blind brother who was dependent on Langley for care, died of starvation three days later.

The fate of the Collyer brothers may not be surprising to viewers of the recent TV

programmes on hoarding, with their familiar images of rooms stacked from floor to ceiling with the individual's collections. It may also not be difficult to imagine how easy a fire could spread once an ignition occurs and the reduced chances of those living inside escaping without injury when exits are blocked by belongings. However, the number of fires as a result of hoarding is unknown.

During her research for the article, Catherine searched the UK's Incident Recording System and the US National Fire Incident Reporting System to find that statistics on fires related to hoarding are not recorded on either system. Without the information available directly linking hoarding to domestic fires, how do we make a strong business case for funding and resources to reduce these risks? We make estimates based on the known risks associated with fire, the socio-demographic break down of fire fatalities and the characteristics held by individuals who hoard.

The social case

Research conducted by the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) in 2006 into the findings from Fatal Fire Investigation Reports revealed that certain groups were at more risk of fire.

- These include (but are not limited to):
- Elderly people (63% of fires involved individuals over the age of 50)
 - People with physical impairments (30%), in

particular those with limited mobility, and/or mental disabilities (15%)

- Dwellings that are in poor physical condition.

In 2008, a research study into the 'economic and social burden of hoarding' on a sample of 864 individuals who self-identified as having hoarding issues and 665 family members found hoarding participants had a nearly three-fold chance of being overweight or obese, were more likely have a spectrum of chronic and severe medical concerns and used mental health services five times as much as the general population. (Tolin, et al, 2008)

This research reinforces the concerns of professionals. The individual's multiple and complex needs combined with the 'poor physical condition' of the property increases the risks of fire in the home and therefore, reduces their ability to respond quickly once a fire has started and places them at increased risk of injury or death.

Individuals with hoarding disorder are also more likely to live alone than the general population and are frequently socially isolated - one research study found that 23.5% of participants also had a social phobia and 24.4% had a Generalised Anxiety Disorder (Frost et al, 2011). As the case of the Langley brothers highlights, individuals who hoard are often viewed as 'social recluses' and are therefore, not brought to the attention of statutory bodies.

Similarly, within Care and Repair, we have found cases are often only highlighted during times of crisis; through hospital admissions or

when aids and adaptations are required in properties due to worsening physical disabilities. A lot of the time it is, as Fire Magazine's title aptly puts, 'a hidden problem'.

It could be argued that in order to prevent fire fatalities individuals who hoard should be sought out and effective support offered. The emphasis here really is on EFFECTIVE support. Agencies need to work together, share information and tailor the services they offer to meet the unique needs of each individual. A 'one size fits all' response will not work.

The economic case

A UK report into the economic costs of fire, in 2004, estimated the human cost of a fire fatality to be £1.375m, per person, with a serious injury estimated at £155,000. The estimated financial costs, in the UK, as a consequence of fire for the same year, which included property losses, the costs of fatal and non-fatal casualties and business disruption, were approximately £2.5 billion. Saving the life of one individual could save the public

£1.375m (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2006). However, as the Langley case highlights, injuries and death cannot just be attributed to fires in the home. Additional savings could be also made to other organisations, such as the NHS, housing providers and environmental health.

The economic and social case for providing support to people who hoard is clear, however, what is not clear is where responsibility lies.

A potential solution?

Research conducted for Fire's article highlights the lengths some states in America are taking to reduce the risks to elderly people. The State of Massachusetts is considering making changes to current law to reclassify hoarding as elder abuse, ensuring that statutory bodies responsible for caring for the elderly not only provide appropriate and effective support but also 'seek out' elderly people who hoard. This change of law will mean that should an elderly person die as a result of hoarding, stating 'we did not know' would be no

defence in a case of elderly abuse.

Despite the absence of clear lines of responsibility within the UK, there is still some good work being done to improve the lives of individuals who hoard. Orbit Care and Repair has supported customers who hoard for many years. We have found that we often have more success in gaining entry to properties than Social Care and the Fire Service as clients are often suspicious of professionals in positions of authority. We do not go into their properties to tell them what to do and take their 'stuff' - the therapeutic relationship is far more egalitarian.

This lack of support provision was a contributory factor in the development of Orbit's Compulsive Hoarding Frontline Worker's Toolkit, in partnership with Coventry University. We hope that the Toolkit and accompanying training will help influence best practice and service provision across the UK over the coming years and provide individuals who hoard with the support they deserve.

Visit <http://compulsivehoardingproject.wordpress.com/training/> for more information.

Arson is a crime REPORT IT

At the beginning of Arson Awareness week, the Arson Prevention Forum has issued 'Top Ten' messages to cut down the risk of arson.

Lee Howell, Chairman of the Arson Prevention Forum said "Every year there are too many deliberate fires some of which result in serious injury as well as causing millions of pounds worth of damage to property. Arson is a crime and whilst arson activity is falling, it causes untold misery to those it affects. By working together, Police, Fire Services and Insurers aim to reduce the level of arson still further but we need individuals and businesses to be aware of the risks and do something about them".

Key messages to cut down on the risk of Arson.

- Ensure you include the impact of arson in your workplace fire risk assessment. A large percentage of businesses fail to return to trading following a fire.
- Schools can be soft targets for arson. The impact on both the local community and pupils are potentially devastating. Speak to your local police crime prevention officer, they may be able to offer advice as to how you can protect (target harden) your building.
- Report accumulated or abandoned refuse to your local council. Don't let it become a target for arson.
- Anti-social behaviour is often a precursor to arson. Report such behaviour through your local neighbourhood policing team, neighbourhood watch team or through Crimestoppers.
- Protect your commercial property. Seek advice on security, good lighting and CCTV will often acts as a deterrent to the criminal.
- Visit your fire service's web-site or the local fire station and speak to them about Arson in your area. They are there to help.
- When closing down your business adopt a thorough close-

down procedure considering:

- External doors are locked
- Internal doors are closed
- No unauthorised persons are left on the premises
- Alarms are switched on
- No accumulation of waste or rubbish
- Take responsibility and think of ways in which someone could start a fire inside or outside of your property. Act on any issues you find.
- Arson attacks on farms and small holdings do happen. Take simple precautions to reduce the likelihood of this happening. Lighting around barns and outbuildings will deter the opportunist thief and the would-be arsonist.
- As a parent or guardian contact your local fire service if you identify a child has been playing with matches within the home. They will often have helpful programmes to ensure child play behaviour doesn't escalate to a serious fire.

For more information please visit www.stoparsonuk.org or contact stoparsonuk@dsfire.gov.uk

