

Arson Prevention - For Small Businesses

Arson Alert:

Stop Your Business Becoming an Arson Statistic!



The most common cause of fire in shops and retail premises is arson. As a business owner, there is a lot you can do to protect yourself through low cost housekeeping.

Each year there are over 3,100 arson attacks on shops, cafes and small businesses¹. It is estimated that up

to 80% of businesses are seriously affected following a major fire². You can help prevent your business becoming one of these statistics with a few simple precautions.

Follow this simple guide and checklist to help reduce the risk of your business going up in smoke.

¹ UK Fire Statistics 2003, Office of Deputy Prime Minister (2005)

² London Chambers of Commerce statistics, 2003

The owner or employer in every workplace has legal responsibility for carrying out a fire risk assessment. This includes identifying the risk of arson and acting to reduce it. By doing this you can protect your business, the jobs and safety of your employees, your stock, your premises and the service you provide to the community.

The first step is to carry out a very simple risk assessment. You do not need to go through this leaflet like a list. Instead, try and think about where your premises are particularly vulnerable. If there is a secured fire-door at the back and open access on the shop front, concentrate on the shop front. A sensible ranking of your particular risks will enable you to make best use of the time you can devote to reducing your risk of arson. This will be more fruitful than putting things off until you can deal with everything at once.

Once you've identified where you may be particularly vulnerable (rubbish piled up, flat roofs next to your premises and so on), use this leaflet as an action plan to help ensure that your business will be safe from arson. This will also help you to comply with your legal duties. Use the checklist as an aide memoire as needed.

Take responsibility

- In any business the owner or manager is responsible for fire safety.
- As the responsible person, you need first to think of all the ways in which someone could start a fire deliberately – inside or outside the premises.
- Have there been small fires in your premises previously? Have you heard about other fires occurring locally? If so, tell the police, and be on the look-out. Small fires are all too often a warning of worse to come.
- Be on the look out for other forms of vandalism. If graffiti or damage is not cleared up immediately, it can make the area a target for minor arson – which can quickly become more serious.
- As part of staff training remind all employees of the arson threat and ask them to report any suspicious behaviour, by anyone!



Check and check again!

- First thing each business day ensure that fire extinguishers and hose reels are ready for use, fire escape doors are unlocked and fire doors are not wedged open.
- Carry out periodic inspections to ensure that all parts of the premises are safe, there are no "hidden" fires, and that the drill for dealing with unattended items can be put into immediate effect.
- If your business welcomes numerous customers or suppliers onto the premises, ensure that they do not have access to staff-only areas. More secure sites need to maintain their security.
- Before locking up for the night, make sure that there are no obvious dangers left behind and that no combustible material is lying around, no

unauthorised people are left on the premises, all doors and windows are securely fastened, alarms and security lighting are switched on.

- Each week, check that the security system, smoke alarm and sprinkler system are fully operational.

Be vigilant!

Are you a target?

- Most arson fires affecting businesses start outside the premises. The culprits are often young vandals who's motive is to cause trouble. They are opportunists who light their fires with anything readily to hand – rubbish, packaging, waste in open skips.

How easily could a fire be started or an incendiary device be concealed?

- Arsonists also strike inside the premises – a member of staff with a grudge, or others trying to make a point or cover up another crime.

How safe are you?

This checklist will help you to reduce your chances of suffering an arson attack:

- Limit the number of entrances in use – but do not lock fire exits!
- Keep a watch on what's going on. Larger businesses may consider having a security guard at main entrances. In smaller shops and businesses you and your staff should be vigilant.
- If you are based in a mall or on an industrial or retail park, talk to the security manager of the whole site. Make sure the site is secured at night and report any signs that it is not.

- Ensure that doors and windows are in good repair and that locks are working.
- Gaps under doors to the street should be as narrow as possible to stop lighted paper or fuel being pushed under them.
- Letterboxes should have a metal container fitted on the inside to contain any fires from lighted rags, paper or fireworks.
- Keep a list of people holding keys. Chase up any that are missing.
- Identify entry routes for intruders – via yards, drain pipes, flat roofs. What can you do to prevent such access?
- Special danger areas include storage and warehousing. Make it a rule that access is only available to authorised members of staff.
- All perimeter security must be maintained and secure. Good security prevents arson as well as theft.
- Is there a system – or should there be – for leaving lights on at night?
- Don't let rubbish become a threat – packaging, waste or rubbish must not be left to accumulate anywhere on the premises. It should be moved regularly to a safe storage place.
- Safe storage means metal bins with closed lids – preferably locked away in their own compartment.
- Arrange regular collections of refuse and waste by the Local Authority or a contractor.

Help and advice on protecting yourself against arson can be obtained from your local Fire Brigade, Crime & Disorder Reduction Partnership (via the Police) or your insurer. Local intelligence helps too. Local businesses sharing information and experience of crime prevention can benefit everyone.