



# AVOIDING FIRE HAZARDS

## Out of the frying pan, into the kitchen

We speak to some of the industry's leading experts on fire prevention, and how businesses can prevent disaster.

A fire in a commercial kitchen can be devastating in both financial and human cost. An unchallenged fire can double in size every minute, emphasising the need for adequate fire safety training for staff members.

When considering fire safety, businesses need to also consider the installation, operation and maintenance of cooking appliances. A commercial kitchen is often full of equipment that if wrongly installed or misused, could be rife with danger.

To help our readers protect their businesses, staff and customers, we have invited some fire safety experts to join our discussion. They include:

Ian Bartle, Managing Director of Nobel Fire Systems - Ian has over 25 years' experience in the fire safety industry, including



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time at major international fire protection organisations such as Ansul and Tyco.

Doug Agnew, Business Development Manager at Abbot Fire Group – specialists in commercial fire safety. Abbot Fire offer a range of fire protection services to help businesses comply with fire safety legislation.

Stephen Adams, Chief Executive of BAFE – Stephen is responsible for the day to day management, marketing and the development of product markets in the fire safety industry.

## The legal stuff

In England and Wales, nearly all premises used for commercial purposes must comply with the regulations set out in 'The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005'.

In the regulations, every business must have a 'Responsible Person' to carry out and regularly review a fire risk assessment of the premises. If the business has 5 or more members of staff, a written record

of the risk assessment must be kept available for review.

We asked our experts why a full fire assessment is essential for any business. Ian Bartle, MD of Nobel Fire Systems tells us "A high quality Fire Risk Assessment will help alleviate a business's potential fire hazards and will also resolve safe exit routes for all those within the building in question. But more than that it will identify those people most at risk and evaluate, then reduce or remove the risks.

**There are over twenty thousand commercial fires in the UK each year.**

Recording, reviewing and updating the assessment then helps 'manage' the risks going forward."

Stephen Adams from BAFE agrees

and added, "a comprehensive fire risk assessment ensures your building is first and foremost safe for your staff and customers to use. It also highlights any further action that you must take to be compliant with the law and to create the safest environment possible.

## The Danger

There are over twenty thousand commercial fires in the UK each year. Ignoring the question of fire safety can lead to disaster for business owners, staff and the general public.

Ian Bartle tells us "in any commercial kitchen the danger of fire is a real and ever present danger. Naked flames, gas lines, cooking fats, the build-up of grease in ventilation ducts and of course the catering equipment itself such as fryers, griddles and ranges."

Stephen Adams highlights the real cost of fire safety ignorance and tells us "fire safety is always about life safety. It sounds extreme but the main danger of inadequate fire safety is risk of death.

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## Keeping your commercial kitchen safe

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Staff and/or visitors could potentially sustain major life changing injuries which could have been easily avoided with the right procedures, systems and provisions in place.

The secondary danger is damage to property and your business, meaning loss of income and possibly reputation; something that is enormously important in the food industry. 80% of all businesses that are affected by a fire either never re-open or close within 18 months (insurance industry data)".

## The Equipment

After the 'Responsible Person' has carried out a fire risk assessment, business owners and operators need to look at what equipment can detect, prevent and respond to fire hazards.

The size of your business will dictate the tools and equipment that need to be installed. Stephen Adams tells us "some smaller kitchens may only require specific fire extinguishers in case of fire and larger ones may need a full suppression system to cover this."

Doug Agnew from Abbot Fire Group goes into more detail – "It's likely that all food businesses will have fire extinguishers suitable for the type of fire risk, a fire alarm system, and fire blankets.

For large commercial kitchens, a fire suppression system should be considered. A suppression system can respond automatically within seconds when a fire breaks out. The nature of an automatic fire suppression system ensures that premises are protected 24 hours a day 7 days a week."

Ian Bartle explains "in our experience the vast majority of businesses require individual solutions to match their exact needs. So speak to a professional supplier and make sure you get the right advice.

There are a number of approved fire suppression systems on the market including Wet Chemical, Water Mist and Condensed Aerosol. Some providing more flexibility of install parameters and faster reaction to fire than others."

## The precautions

There are important measures that business owners can take to reduce the



risk of fire. As well as a comprehensive fire detective system, it's vital that the system is maintained. Ian Bartle agrees and tells us "it's very important that a business continuously monitors the 'health' of its system with regular service and maintenance of the installation.

Another precaution worth considering to assist in the process of fire prevention is to install a fixed system. This reduces the risk to staff by automating the fire

fighting in the most dangerous area in the business, in a safe location away from the fire."

Keeping the workplace clean will also help reduce the risks posed by fire. Regular duct cleaning to remove residue is required by law for most commercial cooking establishments.

One in three restaurant fires is caused by grease, and if a business cannot prove to



an insurance company that regular and recent duct cleaning has taken place, they won't be covered by the policy.

Correct training for staff is also incredibly important. Doug Agnew tells us “ensuring staff are aware of the risk of fire. This is done through ensuring all staff have received fire safety training. This training includes identifying the risk of fire, familiarisation of extinguishers and fire types, and can also include hands-on experience of operating a fire extinguisher in a controlled environment.”

## **The consequences**

Fire safety legislation exists primarily to protect life. Under the legislation, the Fire and Rescue services in the UK can visit a business at any time to carry out an inspection. They will want to see a company's risk assessment, and that they have implemented the correct preventative and reactional measures.

If it's not up to standard, Stephen Adams says “you could face prosecution. Minor penalties can be up to £5,000 and major penalties can have unlimited fines and up to 2 years in prison.”

Doug Agnew describes what could happen if fire does break out – “even a small fire can have a huge impact on a business operation, resulting in down time, and loss of earnings. Many small businesses who experience a fire find it can mean the end of their business and they cease trading. In a worst case scenario, someone could die as the result of a fire. If the health and safety executive deem that businesses are negligent in their fire safety precautions, they can be prosecuted.”

Other than the legal and financial damages, Stephen Adams tells of the mental cost. “Other implications, and more life changing would be the mental consequences of living with the knowledge that as the ‘Responsible Person’ you could have done more to protect other people's lives.”

It's clear that taking fire safety seriously will protect not only your business, but the lives of your staff and customers. By following the simple steps highlighted by our team of experts, you can ensure your business is compliant and safe.