

## Why regular fire alarm servicing and testing is so important

In the domestic property market, the nearest one is likely to get to a fire alarm, will be a smoke alarm. Although the smoke alarm is a vital early warning system for fire dangers, this article is going to focus more on the commercial establishments need to ensure a regular and robust regime of maintenance for the fire safety equipment located there, especially, fire alarms and fire extinguishers.

### **Fire alarm maintenance in the workplace**

The compliant workplace needs to have a good number of smoke detectors and fire alarm activation points situated around the building in order to comply with the latest legislation on fire safety and best practice. However, it is not enough to just have these fire alarm devices, it is also extremely important to have them regularly maintained and serviced by a competent engineer. There are several very good reasons why any company should adopt a serious approach toward regular fire alarm servicing inside their premises.

The most significant reason is the Fire Code Guidance, specifically the British Standard 5839, Clause 44. In this clause it states that any fire alarm systems must be given a full service, in order to identify faults and other problems which could prevent the fire alarm from working properly in an emergency. This first point may sound obvious, after all, what is the point of having an inactive or faulty fire alarm system? This regular servicing procedure must also occur in order to comply with the BS5839, and if the maintenance is not carried out in accordance with the above standard, the fire alarm systems will fail to comply.

Clearly, the need for this servicing regime should not be carried out simply to have your company remain compliant, it should be carried out to ensure the safety for your employees and visitors to your site.

Fire alarm servicing needs to be done on a regular basis in order to ensure that all the parts of the fire alarm system are working correctly. In a standard office building, fire alarms and detectors can become contaminated with dust and other airborne particles. This will adversely affect the ability of the detector to function as intended and could therefore fail to detect traces of smoke and heat. In addition, the working parts of the fire or smoke alarm can also become dirty, thus restricting its activation or causing it to activate when it shouldn't.

False alarms are not only annoying, but they can also cost you to experience a loss in productivity time and if a regular occurrence, they may cause staff to ignore the activation, as they believe it is yet another false alarm. The last scenario is a very dangerous position to be in, as you need to ensure that all personnel evacuate in a safe and speedy manner on each fire alarm activation.

As a side, but related note, fire alarm tests or drills should not be advertised throughout the workforce, as employees may view them as just that and fail to

respond as they should. Every activation of a fire alarm, whether it be a scheduled test, a fire drill or a false alarm, should result in a timely response and evacuation of the building, as one never knows when the activation could be a genuine one.

### **Fire alarms do not last indefinitely**

Another very good reason why fire alarm servicing and maintenance is so important is the amount of time the fire systems have been installed. Although the basic function of a fire alarm doesn't change, the design and technology of the alarm system can and often does. There are better fire alarm systems and smoke detectors, with updated designs that help to make a building safer, or which will not be affected by the vibration, noise or emissions of industrial machinery and cause false alarm situations. Maintaining the fire alarm system often identifies problems within the system that may not be apparent with a quick, visual inspection. Such problems could affect the safety of the entire building and everyone inside.

There are other items of fire emergency equipment that will also require inspection and maintenance from time to time, but items such as the emergency cradle located at the top of stairwells in non-electrical, so would be easier to inspect by a competent person. The fire alarm and smoke alarm systems must be checked for operational integrity by a qualified engineer and a suitable record of the maintenance and inspection must be recorded and kept for inspection on the business premises.

### **The importance of fire extinguisher maintenance**

As a business owner, one is most probably concerned with everyday trade, paying your workforce and winning new clients. Because of the many pressures on business owners, it can be so easy to forget about the fire extinguishers that sit unnoticed for most of the time. When you think about it, you are unlikely to even notice a fire extinguisher unless there is an emergency, and you need to use one.

Much like the smoke and fire alarm systems, if your fire extinguishers are not correctly maintained, you could be subjecting your employees, visitors and business premises to the very serious risk that fire presents. One should remember that fire extinguishers are the first line of defence when it comes to stopping the spread of a fire, so it's imperative that you keep them in good working order.

The very last thing you will want is an emergency to arise, only to discover that the fire extinguishers do not work, simply because they haven't had a regular maintenance schedule adhered to.

### **Check the tags on fire extinguishers**

On the day your fire extinguishers are delivered to your premises, they must first be commissioned. All this means is that they must be assembled in the correct manner, and a number of checks must be performed on them to ensure they are effective from the moment they are installed.

Once these checks have been completed, a maintenance tag must be attached to the fire extinguisher, detailing important information about the checks that were completed and the extinguisher itself. These will include the following:

- The date
- The weight of the fire extinguisher

- Details of person carrying out the checks
- The next service date
- The extended service date

## Fire extinguisher maintenance and the law

According to the Regulatory Reform Fire Safety Order, where fire extinguishers are required to be installed by law and provided, such as in commercial premises, they must all be suitably maintained by a “competent” person at least once a year. That is, someone who has the correct tools, training and experience.

When carrying out this maintenance, all activities should be carried out in accordance with the British Standard BS5306-3: 2017, and this ensures that all the fire extinguishers are maintained correctly and to the latest standards.

As well as performing essential maintenance, the competent engineer also must make sure that the equipped fire extinguishers are relevant to the risks associated with the building. This means that in large commercial kitchens, wet chemical extinguishers must be used, whereas businesses using chemicals processes and garage forecourts should have dry powder fire extinguishers.

## Monthly maintenance of fire extinguishers

Although the law clearly states that fire extinguishers should be checked annually, it is preferable to make check on a monthly basis. By carrying out monthly checks, you are ensuring that your extinguishers are all in working order when it comes round to the annual service. When performing these checks, look for the following issues:

- There should be no superficial wear and tear on the fire extinguisher
- The pressure gauge must be at the correct level
- The anti-tamper seals must be intact
- There must be no locking pins missing

By adhering to these simple checks and procedures, your fire and smoke alarm systems and fire extinguishers will remain in good working order, you and your business will remain compliant, but most importantly, you, your workers and visitors will be safer.

**Hashtags:** #FireMaintenanceEquipment      #FireAlarms      #FireExtinguishers  
#SmokeAlarms