



Practical Risk Management Advice for Offices



There are over 10 million office workers in the UK working in over 200 million square metres of office space.

Whether your office is a small room in a shared building or a large corporate office, it will share many of the same risks and hazards.

Obviously, this guide cannot deal with all the risks however, understanding and managing the most common ones can help you identify what parts of your business are most susceptible to the types of claims this commercial sector most commonly faces.

We've created this guide to help you safeguard your business, employees, contractors and site visitors.

Common risks covered in this guide

Electrical fires



Did you know...?



of accidental fires in the workplace are caused by faulty electrical appliances and leads.¹



Find out more...

[Find an NICEIC Contractor](#)

[Find an ECA approved contractor](#)

[Find a NAPIT registered contractor](#)

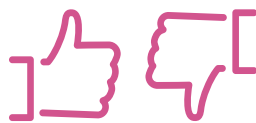
[Get information on BS 7671 IET Wiring Regulations](#)

[Learn about RSA's Property Risk Engineering services](#)

[Access HSE resources on Electrical Safety at Work \(UK\)](#)

[Access HSE resources on Electrical Safety at Work \(NI\)](#)

[Read the HSE guide on Electrical Switchgear Safety](#)



Dos and don'ts

- Do make sure that installation and testing of fixed installations are undertaken in accordance with UK regulations (see planning ahead).
- Do make sure all non-critical electrical equipment is turned off and plugs are taken out when closing down the office each night.
- Do examine portable electrical appliances regularly – at least yearly.
- Do ensure enough sockets are available – check outlets aren't overloaded.
- Do make sure anyone who works on or with electrical equipment has had suitable training, knowledge, experience and supervision.
- Do educate your employees about the risks of electricity.
- Do protect all cords with special covers when subject to foot traffic.
- Do keep equipment that uses heat or which could overheat well ventilated and not covered.
- Do ensure that any equipment brought in by employees, hired or borrowed, are checked and maintained properly before use.
- Do regularly clean electrical equipment safely to reduce the build up of dust and dirt. Always switch off and unplug appliances before cleaning/adjusting them.
- Do remove any damaged or faulty equipment, wiring, plugs from the premises immediately.
- Do operate a permit to work system for anyone working on electrical installations.
- Don't use equipment if it appears damaged or faulty.
- Don't extend electrical cables beyond reach or run electrical cords through high-traffic areas, under carpets, or across doorways.
- Don't use an extension cord as a permanent source of electric power and never connect multiple extension cords, also known as “daisy chaining.”

- Don't store any combustible materials near electrical switchgear, distribution boards and/or light fittings.
- Don't locate electrical equipment in close proximity to water.



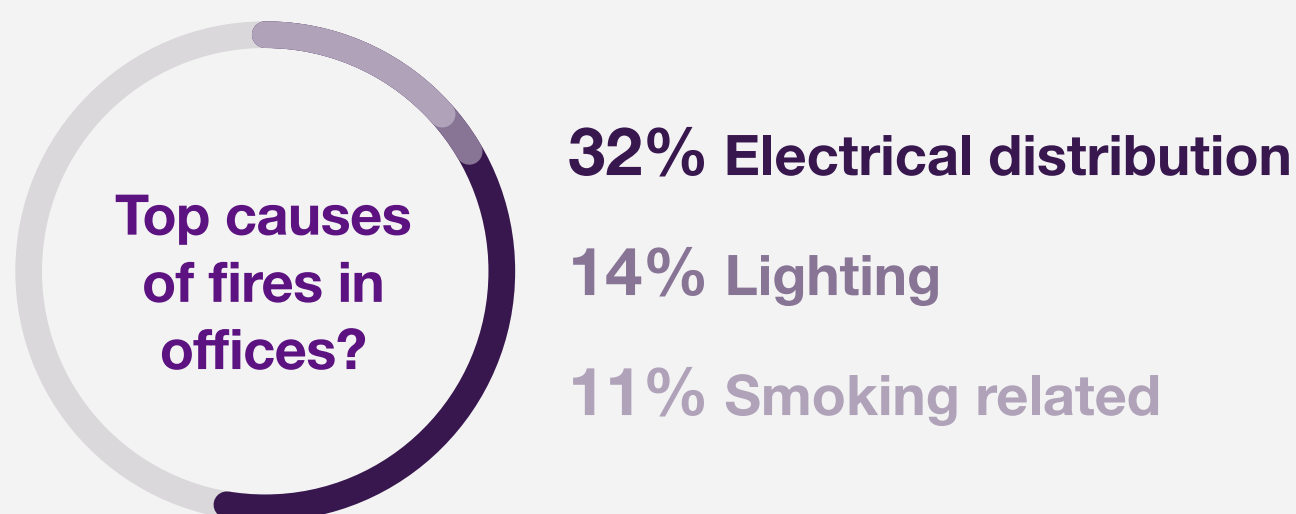
Planning ahead

- Business owners and operators are responsible for the electrical systems and any electrical appliances in their establishment. This is governed by the current edition of the Institute of Engineering and Technology (IET) Wiring Regulations: BS7671. These specify a range of documentation that should be kept on site to record work on electrical systems (including maintenance). Inspection, testing and maintenance should be by a member of the National Inspection Council for Electrical Installation Contracting (NICEIC), Electrical Contractors Association (ECA), SELECT (Scotland) or similar approved UKAS accredited bodies who are regulated for commercial installations.
- Find out when your next periodic inspection is due and set a reminder. Keep a copy of your Electrical Inspection Condition Report together with written evidence of any remedial work completed afterwards.
- Routine checks of electrical accessories, cables and appliances for obvious visible wear and tear or damage can be carried out by an instructed person. An electrically skilled person is required to carry out all routine planned maintenance of equipment, periodic inspection and testing and any urgent repairs.
- All major electrical switchgear, major cable runs and key IT equipment should be subject to a programme of infrared thermographic surveys, preferably annually as a minimum. Full records should be available for review, along with records to show that defects have been rectified.

¹ Source: Government statistic

Fire Safety and Risk Assessments

? Did you know...?



i Find out more...

[Fire Safety Risk Assessments – Offices and Shops](#)

👍👎 Dos and don'ts

- Do encourage good standards of housekeeping.
- Do regularly check your electrical wiring and electrical equipment. Check for damage, that employees are using the equipment correctly and the equipment is being maintained in accordance with manufacturers requirements.
- Do turn off all electrical appliances at the end of the day.
- Do ensure there is a suitable fire detection and warning system in place. Make sure the systems are maintained, frequent tests are carried out and if the system is electrically powered has a back up electric supply.
- Do provide the appropriate number and type of fire extinguishers. Check that they are maintained and located close to the fire hazards.
- Do allocate designated smoking areas. Provide suitable receptacles so smoking materials can be disposed of safely. Regularly clear the area of dry leaves, paper and other combustible materials.
- Do prepare a fire emergency plan so that everyone knows what to do if they discover a fire or hear the fire alarm.
- Do hold regular fire drills at least annually. Practice an evacuation and record what went well and what improvements are necessary.
- Do check that ventilation points and filters are not blocked which can cause overheating.
- Do keep all fire escape routes and exists free of obstruction. Ensure fire doors are unlocked, emergency routes are clearly signed and well lit.
- Do inspect, test and maintain fire doors and their self-closing devices to ensure good working order.
- Do store hazardous materials such as cleaning products, sanitizers in approved containers and away from ignition sources?
- Don't store paper, card, cardboard boxes and other flammable materials inappropriately e.g. under desks or next to potential ignition sources.

- Don't leave cooking appliances unattended whilst they are in use.
- Don't block or cover fire safety equipment such as smoke detectors, fire extinguishers or sprinkler heads.
- Don't wedge fire doors open. Fire doors are effective at holding back fire, heat and smoke but only if they're closed.

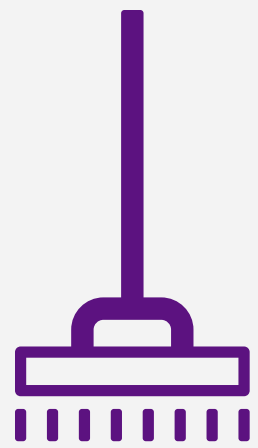
✓ Planning ahead

- A fire risk assessment is a legal requirement in the UK. If you are an employer, owner, landlord or anyone else with control of a commercial premises, it is your duty to ensure a fire risk assessment is completed by a competent person. It is recommended you engage professional support to help you carry out your fire risk assessment.
- The assessment needs to identify the fire hazards, the people at risk and you need to document what measures are in place that either remove, reduce or mitigate the risks. You need to consider all the people who use your premise (employees, visitors, and contractors), remember to include those with special considerations such as people with disabilities.
- The fire risk assessment should be recorded and be reviewed every 12 months, or earlier if any substantial changes are made to the layout or use of the building.
- The information outlined in the fire risk assessment should be shared with all employees. All employees should be trained in fire safety. It is worth considering appointing a number of employees to become competent fire wardens.

Housekeeping



Did you know...?



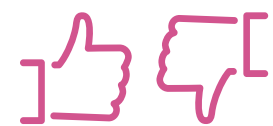
Poor housekeeping is a leading cause of slips, trips and falls. The majority of trips are caused by obstructions in walkways.



Find out more...

[Causes and prevention - Slips and trips – HSE](#)

[RCG002 – Fire Safety Inspections Risk Control Guide](#)



Dos and don'ts

- Do conduct documented periodic walk through inspections to help identify poor housekeeping hazards.
- Do keep aisles, hallway, stairways, fire exit routes and fire fighting equipment free from boxes and clutter.
- Do clean the areas around drinks machines and sinks. Consider installing anti-slip flooring and mats in busy areas.
- Do create a clear desk policy. Make sure work stations are well organised, clean, clear of debris and no trip hazards are present.
- Do clear up spillages immediately and ensure cleaning is carried out thoroughly using the correct products and equipment.
- Do clean computers, keyboards, mice and phones regularly to disinfect from germs and viruses.
- Do fully close doors and cabinet drawers. Avoid chairs, equipment and drawers jutting into walkways.
- Do assign lockers or storage areas for employees personal items?
- Do provide facilities for storing food items in the office. Discourage food being left in desks. Arrange for cleaning of communal fridges/ microwaves and storage areas and create rules for clearing out food.
- Do provide an adequate number of containers for waste disposal?
- Do store hazardous materials such as cleaning products, sanitizers in approved containers and away from ignition sources?
- Do provide safe stacking and storing arrangements, make sure that your shelves are installed properly and that they can hold the weight of your storage.
- Do keep office machines away from the edges of desks and tables.
- Do remove combustible waste from the building daily.
- Do provide first-aid facilities, make sure equipment is fully stocked and in clean condition.

- Don't store combustible materials in boiler rooms, or next to ignition sources such as electrical distribution boards, heaters or electrical equipment.
- Don't store combustible materials, waste, flammable liquids or gas bottles against buildings. Combustible materials and waste (including idle pallets) should be stored at least 10 metres from any buildings or outdoor equipment where possible.
- Don't keep broken or damaged items in the workplace, these must be fixed, replaced or disposed of as quickly as possible.

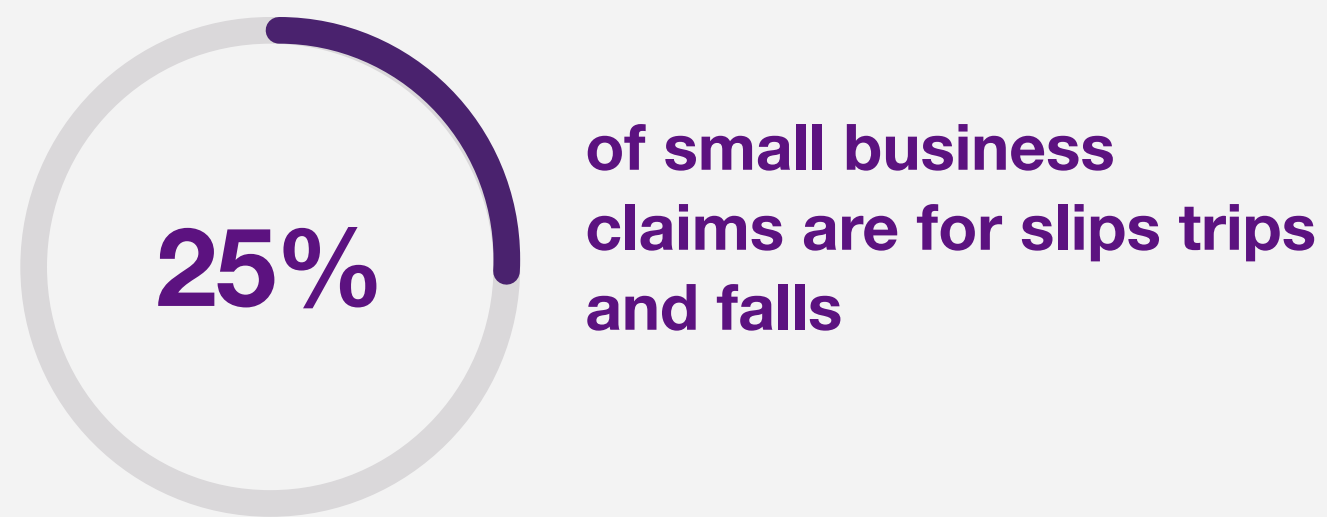


Planning Ahead

- Good housekeeping should apply throughout the entire premises, indoors and out. It is more than mere cleanliness. It requires the avoidance of congestion, and attention to such details such as, an orderly layout of the whole workplace, adequate storage arrangements, and suitable provision for cleaning and maintenance. Poor housekeeping can frequently contribute to accidents and incidents by concealing hazards that cause injuries and damage. Good standard of housekeeping is also one of the most cost-effective ways of reducing the fire inception and development risks. It ranges from good layout of production and storage areas to the routine day-to-day matters such as the removal of waste
- A sound method to ensure that housekeeping is done is to prepare a check list to suit the requirements of the workplace and introduce a weekly housekeeping audit procedure. Once this has been developed, inform and train employees on the procedures.
- Instruct your employees to perform a housekeeping routine of their workstations to keep on top of things and encourage them to report deficient conditions.

Slips, trips and falls

? Did you know...?



i Find out more...

[Health and Safety Toolbox: Slips & Trips](#)

[RSA Health & Safety Management Risk Control Guide](#)

[RSA Commercial Claims Slips & Trips Guide](#)

👍👎 Dos and don'ts

- Do conduct documented periodic walk through inspections to help identify and rectify slip, trip and fall hazards.
- Do clear up spillages and ensure cleaning is carried out thoroughly using the correct products and equipment.
- Do display slippery floor signs as soon as a wet hazard has been discovered.
- Do mark unexpected changes in floor levels, such as slopes and steps, with high-visibility tape or paint.
- Do ensure staircases are provided with suitable and sufficient handrails.
- Do keep telephone and electrical cords/wires out of aisles and walkways.
- Do set an office dress code that covers sensible footwear.
- Do ensure that casters on chairs are secured and all parts of the chair are sturdy, so they do not present a hazard to the user.
- Do secure racking or shelving. Anchor to the wall or floor to prevent furniture tip-over accidents.
- Do use external contractors or trained internal maintenance teams to complete work at height in offices e.g. changing light fittings, installing light projectors, cleaning gutters.
- Don't store materials on top of cabinets.
- Don't allow employees to stand on chairs, shelves, tables, buckets or other unstable objects to reach items.
- Don't locate towels or towel dispensers too far from sinks so that once people have washed their hands, they drip water across the floor when trying to grab a towel. Assign an employee to regularly check rooms to keep the floors clean and dry.

Ladders

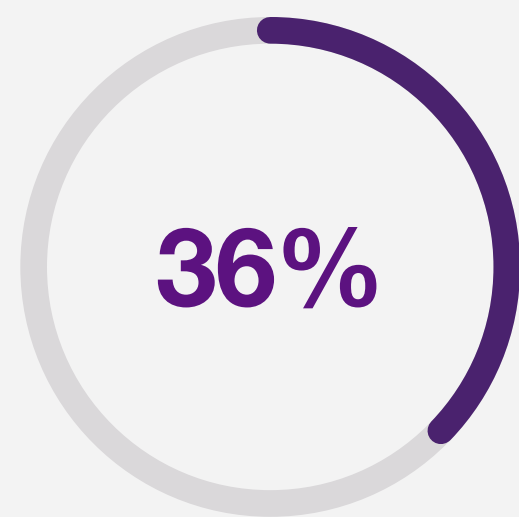
- Do perform and document a pre-check every time you use a ladder or step ladder to ensure it is in good condition, suitable for the job and safe to use. Maintain formal records of the ladder check.
- Do check the ground under the ladder is level and firm.
- Do maintain three points of contact with the ladder at all times.
- Don't allow untrained workers to use ladders.
- Don't use the ladder if feet are missing, worn or damaged, as the ladder could slip.
- Don't lean away from the ladder – keep your body centred between the rails of the ladder at all times.
- Don't use ladders near doorways and lock the door if necessary.

✓ Planning ahead

- Maintain equipment to prevent leaks, and contain spillages from machines such as drinks vending dispensers.
- Repair or replace any worn or frayed carpets/cracked tiles.
- In high slip-risk areas, choose flooring that can cope with water and grease and still be non-slip. If there are any areas in your premises that are notorious for becoming slippery, consider purchasing slip-resistant mats. Safety mats are ideal for high-traffic areas and for entrances in bad weather.
- Ensure that you have suitable safety measures in place to check on the condition of chairs and furniture.
- Make sure there is adequate lighting to your premises, particularly in car parks and around steps, stairs and slopes.
- Sign up to weather warnings to alert you when external footpaths may need to be gritted or de-iced. Remove wet leaves that pose a slip hazard.

Manual Handling

? Did you know...?



HSE figures suggest that of all the reportable accidents every year around 36% of them will be manual handling incidents.⁵

i Find out more...

[Manual Handling at Work](#)

[Manual Handling Publications](#)

👍👎 Dos and don'ts

- Do check whether you need to move the item at all.
- Do avoid the need for manual handling if possible – use the correct mechanical handling plant or lifting aid for the task and environment.
- Do ensure that any lifting equipment is regularly maintained and inspected.
- Do observe ergonomic posture when employees are carrying or moving loads.
- Do store regularly used items within easy access between knee and shoulder.
- Do provide information on the weight of heavy loads.
- Do ask for assistance from a co-worker if products are too heavy or awkward to lift.
- Do consider the route, the height of the load and the starting position of the load to make sure there are no obstacles in the way; and check to see if there's space for the load at its destination.
- Do make sure when carrying objects that you can see over the load.
- Do push rather than pull manual handling equipment whenever possible, and lean in the direction you're going.
- Do break up loads to make them more manageable.
- Do raise the height of working platforms to reduce the need to bend or twist.

✅ Planning ahead

- Plan ahead and determine if the need for lifting can be minimised by applying good engineering design techniques.
- Manual handling risk assessments to be completed by competent persons. The assessment to cover all manual handling activities and tasks that present a risk of injury that cannot be avoided.
- Residual manual handling to be managed by assessment of each task which may require redesigning the task, altering shelving, changing layout of the premises, the provision of appropriate mechanical handling plant and/or lifting aids.
- Provide practical and technical training to employees in the proper lifting procedures with regular review and refresher training. Ensure that, for all training provided, employees sign to indicate that they have both received and understood the training. This should include any agency/temporary staff who may be used at your premises.
- Make sure you take account of the individual requirements of workers who may be especially at risk such as new or expectant mothers; people with disabilities; inexperienced new, young or temporary workers; older workers; migrant workers who may not have English as their first language.

² Source: HSE

Display Screen Equipment

Did you know...?



HSE figures suggests that 8.9 millions days were lost due to musculoskeletal work-related ill health in 2019/20.³

Find out more...

[Working safely with display screen equipment: Overview - HSE](#)

Dos and don'ts

- Do carry out a DSE risk assessment to identify potential problems for users of DSE. The assessment should consider the display screens, keyboards, work desks and chairs and environmental factors such as space, lighting, heat, noise and humidity. The assessment should also take into account individual needs and reasonable adjustments should be made.
- Do make a record of the assessments and your significant findings. Any record you produce should be simple and focused on controls.
- Do ensure the risk assessment applies to fixed workstations, mobile workers and home workers or other flexible workers.
- Do ensure that the work surface large enough for all the necessary equipment, papers, etc and the user comfortably reach all the equipment and papers they need to use (without over-reaching, twisting or stretching).
- Do check that the monitor is set up correctly, free from glare and flickering, the users eyes are level with the top of the screen, the monitor can be tilted, raised and lowered and has brightness, contrast and text size controls.
- Do provide suitable chairs that can be adjusted, padded, provides lumbar support, has free-moving wheels, and is stable. Ideally chairs should have 5 caster to ensure better support.
- Do provide keyboards that are separate from the screen so it can be suitably positioned.
- Do complete regular checks to ensure work stations, components and accessories are maintained and in good working order.
- Do ensure that laptop users have a stand or raised support for their laptop so they can position it at an appropriate height. Whenever possible, users should be encouraged to use a docking station or firm surface and a full-sized keyboard and mouse.

- Do plan work so there are breaks or changes of activity for employees who are DSE users
- Do arrange eye tests for DSE users if they ask for one, Provide glasses if an employee needs them only for DSE use.

Planning ahead

- Provide information, instruction and health and safety training to DSE users to help them identify risks and safe working practices. Complete regular reviews and refresher training. Ensure that, for all training provided, employees sign to indicate that they have both received and understood the training. This should include any agency/temporary staff who may be used at your premises.
- Make sure you take account of the individual requirements of workers who may be especially at risk such as new or people with disabilities; older workers etc.

³Source: HSE

Security

Did you know...?



Tailgating is one of the most widespread security breaches affecting offices.

Find out more...

[Risk Control Guide - Security](#)

Dos and don'ts

- Do assess the security risks to your company, its physical offices, and employees.
- Do install high quality locks to all doors and points of entry. Keep these locked when they are not being used even during regular business hours.
- Do introduce ID badges and consider key card entry system for employees. Educate users on the risks associated with tailgating and have a clear policy in place with guidelines and procedures on what to do should an unauthorised person gain access.
- Do require strong passwords on computers and tell employees to lock their computers when they leave their desk.
- Do keep a record of visitors, either electronically or on paper. Provide supervision.
- Do install proper lighting around the building's perimeter and at all entrances and exits.
- Do label your office equipment with special tags that include unique inventory identifiers.
- Do install a digital surveillance system to act as a visual deterrent.
- Do secure the premises with a monitored intruder alarm system.
- Do always secure cash in a safe with a suitable cash rating.
- Do ensure portable theft attractive equipment is secured to the desk such as laptops.
- Do instruct employees to keep their personal belongings secure and locked in a desk or cabinet.
- Do consider hiring security personnel during evenings and weekends when your building is unoccupied.
- Do conduct employee background checks.

- Do install fencing and gates around the property to act as the first layer of defence.
- Don't leave the office unmanned and open.
- Don't leave important company documents laying around on desks. Introduce a clear desk policy, Keep important documents in locked cabinets.

Planning ahead

Security measures can be considered in terms of three broad categories:

- Physical security
- Electronic security
- Human security

Some key points to remember when assessing or considering security measures are:

- Use specialist installers who are certified and approved by organisations such as National Security Inspectorate (NSI) or The Security Systems Alarms Inspection Board (SSAIB). They will install in accordance with the appropriate standard and with the manufacturer's guidelines.
- Integrate security measures so that they work together. This includes integration with fire, health and safety, as well as cyber security measures.
- Ensure that security measures are commensurate with the risk and are managed and maintained regularly.
- Ensure that employees are trained in the use of security systems and know how to respond to activations.