Joint Zoom meeting
22nd October 2020

**South Cumbria &
North Lancashire Branch**

**South Cumbria Occupational
Health & Safety Group**

Topic: *Managing your Fire Risk Assessment in the aftermath of Covid-19.*

Speakers: Andy Anderson, Managing Director, SOA, Safety Ltd & SOA Engineering Ltd, Dalton-in-Furness

Gary McAteer, Chair, *South Cumbria & North Lancashire IOSH Branch*, welcomed members to the joint virtual meeting with *South Cumbria Occupational Health & Safety Group* (*SCOHSG*). He then introduced our speaker, Andy Anderson, Managing Director, *SOA, Safety Ltd* & *SOA Engineering Ltd*.

Andy explained that he is a professional engineer who now specialises in fire safety, safety engineering and training. He said that he had gained a wide range of practical safety engineering experience during his 25 years of service in the *Royal Navy* where a pragmatic and innovative approach to safety engineering was often required.

He reminded members that it was it was important to review workplace Fire Risk Assessments so that they took account of changes in the workplace due to the Covid-19 regulations. These might include changes in work patterns, the way staff move round the workplace such as one way systems, the introduction of shift working etc… all of which needed to be considered while also complying with UK Fire regulations.

Andy said that current workplace *Fire Risk Assessments* in England and Wales are based on requirements in *The Regulatory (Fire Safety) Order 2005* plus later amendments which currently include 106 regulations covering a wide range of workplaces and homes. These regulations require that there is an up-to-date *Fire Risk Assessment* for all workplaces that includes consideration of the following:

- Identifying appropriate locations for fire fighting equipment, signs and notices.
- Assessing needs for fire detectors and warning systems in specific areas – dependent on type of work being undertaken.
- Identifying and labelling safe emergency escape routes and exits that take account of the needs of vulnerable people who may be on the premises. For example, the elderly, young children, those with disabilities etc…
- Identifying and labelling assembly points.
- Ensuring that dangerous and/or combustible substances are not left in main thoroughfares and that they are stored safely.
- Producing an emergency fire evacuation plan.
- Providing clear, concise information about site fire safety procedures to employees and other people on the premises.
- Establishing a staff fire safety training/awareness programme – to ensure that managers and employees know what to do if there is a fire emergency.
- Undertaking fire safety regular audits to ensure that fire escape routes, exits, signage etc…

Andy reminded members that it is important that the person undertaking the *Fire Risk Assessment* understands how fires start and how they spread. A fire will only ignite when heat (a source of ignition), oxygen (air) and fuel (something that burns) are all present. Therefore, a key element of a *Fire Risk Assessment*, is to ensure that workplace conditions that might lead to the ignition of a fire are eliminated and, if a fire does occur, its growth and spread can be restricted by

using control measures that have been put in place such as, fire detectors, fire doors, fire extinguishers used by competent staff etc...

He also explained that the fire risk assessor needs a clear understanding of how the building(s) have been constructed and designed, the full range of activities that take place on site, and the site's 24-hour occupancy rates in order to achieve a robust *Fire Risk Assessment*.

Andy said that workplace emergency fire evacuation plans need to show that:

- All escape routes are kept clear of obstructions.
- Fire doors installed to contain the spread of a fire are closed as required.
- Escape routes are clearly marked and as short and direct as possible.
- There are enough exits and escape routes for everyone on site to escape in a timely manner.
- Emergency doors open easily.
- Emergency lighting has been installed where necessary.
- All employees have been trained to know and use their nearest escape route.
- There are safe assembly points for employees and that all building occupants can be accounted for.
- At least one fire drill per year has been undertaken and that the results have been recorded as part of the fire safety and evacuation plan.

Andy reminded members that workplace compliance with Covid-19 regulations meant that *Fire Risk Assessments* needed to be revised to take account of changes in working patterns and the way that workplaces were occupied. This included assessing whether to prioritise the need to observe social distancing and follow one-way systems rather than the using the most direct fire evacuation route in the event of a fire emergency. Other considerations include reduced building occupancy, identifying potential lone working areas, escape route obstruction by additional Covid-19 partitions etc…

As with all Risk assessments it is necessary to follow basic principles:

1. Identify the fire hazards.
2. Identify people at risk.
3. Evaluate, and then remove or reduce the risks.
4. Record your findings, prepare an emergency plan and provide training.
5. Review and update the fire risk assessment regularly.

Andy then fielded some quite demanding questions from attendees before Elsa thanked him for his useful presentation and brought the meeting to a close.

Andy can be contacted via: www.soasafety.co.uk

<u>Related UK Government and *HSE* web site links</u>:

Workplace : https://www.gov.uk/workplace-fire-safety-your-responsibilities

Fire Risk assessments: https://www.gov.uk/workplace-fire-safety-your-responsibilities/fire-risk-assessments

Fire safety and evacuation plans: https://www.gov.uk/workplace-fire-safety-your-responsibilities/fire-safety-and-evacuation-plans

Fire safety equipment, drills and training: https://www.gov.uk/workplace-fire-safety-your-responsibilities/fire-safety-equipment-drills-and-training

HSE's Fire safety tool box: https://www.hse.gov.uk/toolbox/fire.htm