

How often should fire alarms be tested on commercial premises?

In order to ensure the safety of all residents, it is a legal requirement that the responsible person must ensure that the premises are equipped with an appropriate amount of fire detectors and alarms. The responsible person assigned must be competent, or go through testing of the fire alarm system, as well as learning how to change a fire alarm battery, or how to stop a fire alarm from beeping, and more.

The relevant British Standard with regards to the testing of a fire alarm system is BS 5839-6: 2019 fire detection and fire alarm systems for buildings. In section 25.2 it states that all fire alarm systems in commercial premises need to be tested weekly to ensure that there has not been any major failure and that the fire alarm system is in working order.

To do this, firstly a list of all outstations within the premises must be created, as each one should be tested in a rotational order, ensuring that all locations are tested regularly. In smaller premises, it is acceptable to test just one location each week - so for example within premises where there are a small number of outstations, these could all be tested over a two-month period in rotational order. In larger premises, it may be more appropriate to test two or three outstations each week, to ensure all devices are tested over the same length of time.

What are the different types of fire alarm systems?

There are two main types of fire alarm systems available. Manual and automatic.

Manual fire alarm systems require a person to activate the fire alarm by a manual call point (outstation), which will register on the fire alarm panel (master station). Manual call points for fire alarm systems need to be located on escape routes and fire exits, with additional fire alarms in higher-risk areas where a fire is most likely to take place.

An automatic fire alarm system is activated automatically by either smoke or heat detection and will also have the ability for a user to manually raise the alarm by an outstation, which again will register on the master station.

Fire alarm systems in commercial or business premises are available in two variants, conventional or addressable. Firstly, a conventional fire alarm system will see a detected fire (whether by automatic fire detection systems or the activation of a fire alarm manual call point) registered on the fire alarm control panel as in one of the identified zones, such as the ground floor, warehouse or plant room, depending on how the system was designed and installed. The second type is an addressable fire alarm system, where a detected fire (whether by automatic fire detection systems or the activation of a fire alarm manual call point) is registered on the fire alarm control panel as a specific location or address within a zone, such as via an automatic smoke detector in the ground floor boiler room, or a fire alarm manual call point by the ground floor rear fire exit.

The type of fire alarm system required in your premises should be identified within the current fire risk assessment.

How should the fire alarm testing be recorded?

In accordance with BS 5839-1: 2019, it is essential that the fire alarm system is subject to periodic inspection and servicing, so that any unrevealed faults are identified and addressed to restore the integrity of the system. This periodic inspection and testing should be carried out by a competent person with specialist knowledge of fire detection and alarm systems, and with sufficient information regarding the system and adequate access to replacement parts and components. The competence of a fire alarm servicing company or organisation can be assured by the use of companies registered with organisations providing third-party certification or accreditation, such as British Approvals For Fire Equipment (BAFE). The nature of the work that should be carried out annually includes the following:

- a manual switch test of every fire alarm manual call point
- a functional test of every automatic fire detection device, including automatic smoke detectors, smoke alarms, automatic heat detectors, optical beam detectors, aspirating systems, and other similar devices. Although the requirement for this work is to be done annually, the works detailed may be carried out over the course of two or more service visits during a 12 month period.

It would also be necessary for the competent person to identify any deficiencies, such as an inadequate amount of fire alarm manual call points, low audibility of fire alarms in areas, and a lack of detection relating to the category of fire alarm installed, as well as any wiring or signal faults identified. It would additionally be necessary to identify any changes in use, layout, and construction of the building that may impact the effectiveness of the system. Any recorded false alarms or faults in the fire log book should also be investigated and where possible, rectified to completion.

A certificate of conformity and suitability should be issued following any periodic inspection and servicing.

Conclusion

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We understand that every client is different and has different requirements, to that end we offer a service package that is tailored around your specific needs. Available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year we really are the number one choice for all your Fire Alarm, Fire Extinguisher & Emergency Lighting requirements.

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