

Businesses face 'widespread' fire fines

* Submitted by: Presswire

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British businesses are being targeted by the government for penalties up to £10,000 or jail if they fail to comply with new fire safety laws...

Sweeping changes to national fire regulations are putting thousands of managers and private landlords directly in the firing line of heavy fines or imprisonment.

And many of those due to be hit in an impending clampdown by enforcement officers are unaware they are even responsible, experts warn.

Recent changes to the fire rules mean compliance now rests with the 'responsible person' who, in most cases, is the employer or the person who has control of a company's premises.

Third-party occupiers of units within multi-occupancy premises as well as the self-employed and some organisations in the voluntary sector are also now included.

They are liable because the order has been extended to cover virtually all premises and types of buildings, and even some open spaces.

Doris Huang, from fire safety consultancy www.Risconline.co.uk, says confusion over the new rules will mean widespread penalties for businesses.

"The government expects busy business leaders to digest a 146-page guide about the changes before assessing their own risk," she explains.

"But the complexity of the law means few will get it right, and they will then be liable to pay a penalty."

Huang's website offers companies a self-assessment service that is linked to the law itself.

"Our online test provides complete peace of mind to any business anxious over its status and obligations," she adds.

Paul Evans of Northamptonshire-based Printer Consumables Supplies says he was stumped by the government's guide to the rules.

"I have experience in doing health and safety risk assessments, but the official guidelines would have taken me days to read through," he says.

"Risc Online took just four hours, and presented me with a comprehensive report advising us of our status. We now know exactly where we stand".

Evans adds several risk assessment firms had approached him, offering fire audits at "vastly inflated prices".

"Confusion over the legislation has meant a wealth of so-called experts have sprung up, ready to rip off worried businesses," he adds.

The new rules, introduced in October, mark the most dramatic change in British fire safety legislation for 50 years.

The law was originally due to come into effect in April, but was postponed when official guides outlining businesses' responsibilities were recalled.