



## Safety signs

Safety signs play an important role in warning of hazards or advising on what precautions need to be taken. They can take several forms. These include signboards, illuminated signs, acoustic signals (such as, a warning sound, bell or pre-recorded evacuation message) or verbal communications given by others. We are used to seeing them wherever we go – in shops, offices, leisure centres, cinemas, hotels and a variety of other places we might visit. They are divided into categories according to the type of message they convey, with each assigned a specific format and set of colours. These are shown in Appendix A. Some signs are required to be displayed by law.

### Legal requirements

Generally, if someone is injured you may need to show that you have met your duty of care.

In addition to this, if you are an employer you must comply with more specific health and safety law as well. This includes the Health and Safety (Safety Signs and Signals) Regulations.

These require you to provide:

- safety signs where risk assessments (under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations) indicate that they are needed. For example, this may be to meet duties under the Health and Safety (First-aid) Regulations; Control of Noise at Work Regulations etc.
- fire safety signs in accordance with the requirements of your fire risk assessment
- road traffic safety signs where there is a risk from the presence or movement of traffic
- relevant information and training for employees on the meaning of any safety signs or signals provided and the precautions to be taken where they are displayed.

These Regulations also detail requirements for signs including their size, colour, shape and format of any text. The use and maintenance of acoustic signals (including fire alarms) and illuminated signs are also covered. Permanent signs are necessary, except in cases where the workplace or a hazard is temporary. There is no need to provide signs if they don't help reduce the risk or if the risk is insignificant.

Even if you are not an employer, but control non-domestic premises you may still have a duty to make sure the premises are safe. This includes the provision of any safety signs or signals where necessary. Further, you may have to provide these anyway to meet other legal duties placed on those other than employers. Examples include, fire safety signs (under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order); asbestos warning signs (under the Control of Asbestos Regulations); no-smoking signs (under the Smoke-free (Signs) Regulations); and more generally under the Occupiers Liability Act.

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## Hazards to look out for

Some of the typical hazards that may require signs include:

- low ceilings or pipes running along ceilings where height restrictions apply and people are at risk of bumping their heads
- areas where objects may fall onto people e.g. in storage areas
- non-obvious steps or sudden changes in floor height or level
- temporary conditions that introduce hazards e.g. icy weather, wet floors or contractors working overhead
- larger than normal visitor numbers to your premises who may not be familiar with the site.\*

\*Note: this list is not exhaustive

## Precautions you can take

Typical precautions include:

- using safety signs to prohibit certain activities (e.g. smoking, access to prohibited areas); warn of certain hazards (e.g. obstacles, drops); mandate certain precautions (e.g. wearing safety harnesses); identify emergency escape routes (e.g. fire exit signs) or firefighting equipment and advise of the location of first-aid facilities
- using signs to warn of any temporary hazard (e.g. whilst floor cleaning is taking place), ensuring that these are removed once the danger has passed
- displaying additional, temporary signs for busy services (such as temporary emergency escape route signage to aid a swift evacuation)
- training staff and volunteers to use some signs together (i.e. safety signs and verbal communication) for some occasions such as busy services with large numbers of people attending.\*

\*Note: this list is not exhaustive






## Making a start

Action	Guidance
1. Walk around your premises to check the suitability of existing safety signage or identify where additional ones are needed.	<p>If you are an employer and need to complete formal risk assessments, these will help you identify circumstances where safety signs are required.</p> <p>Remember, even if you are not an employer, but control non-domestic premises you may still have to complete certain risk assessments. These might show that certain safety signs will need to be displayed. You may need to check any assessments (e.g. fire risk assessment; asbestos management plan etc.) you have made, to see what exactly is required.</p> <p>Check all areas, including any boiler room, office, toilet and outdoor areas. Take care to avoid using too many signs in close proximity to each other. Signs are only effective if they can be clearly seen and properly understood. Too many signs together may cause confusion with the chance of important information being overlooked.</p> <p>If your premises is relatively small with a simple layout and few hazardous activities, you may not need much in the way of signs. However, for larger or multi-room premises or those having a number of hazardous activities, a range of signs might be necessary. Remember, that you must only use safety signs if there is a significant risk that can't be avoided or controlled in another way.</p>

Action	Guidance
<p>2. Display the required safety signs, making sure that they are properly maintained.</p> <p>You may need to check them periodically, making sure they remain legible and prominently displayed.</p> <p>In some cases, you may also need to make a note of any checks or inspections you make.</p>	<p>Any signs provided must comply with the requirements of the Health and Safety (Safety Signs and Signals) Regulations. These are outlined in Appendix A and further information is available at <a href="http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/books/l64.htm">www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/books/l64.htm</a>.</p> <p>In some cases, more than one type of sign may be necessary. For example, an illuminated warning sign indicating a specific risk combined with an acoustic alarm meaning 'general danger' to alert people.</p> <p>All safety signs must be properly maintained. This may involve routine cleaning; checks to see that they are in good condition; regular inspection of illuminated signs; and testing of acoustic signals. Damaged or worn signs should be replaced and any obstructions removed. 'Home-made' signs are best avoided.</p> <p>All safety signs should function in the event of a power failure unless the hazard is itself eliminated by the power failure. Usually this means that they are visible either with the aid of any emergency lighting provided or being made of a phosphorescent material.</p>
<p>3. Make sure that employees understand what any safety signs and signals mean, providing them with any necessary information and training.</p> <p>Make a note of any information or training that is provided to individuals.</p>	<p>It is important that employees understand the meaning of any signs or signals seen or heard during their work. Although the meaning of most safety signs is commonly understood, some employees (particularly new, young or inexperienced ones) may be not so familiar with them. Therefore, it is important that the meaning of any sign is clearly explained, and that employees are aware of the consequences of not following them.</p> <p>Generally, for many smaller premises the type of signs in use are likely to be familiar to people, and in common use, but you should check to make sure they are understood. For any arrangements you have to use temporary signs, it is important that people know when and how they are supposed to use them.</p> <p>More detailed training may be required in premises where visitor numbers are much larger or where specific hazards arise which are out of the ordinary.</p>
<p>4. Document your arrangements and responsibilities for using safety signs or signals at your premises.</p> <p>Keep the notes you have made in the steps above.</p>	<p>If you have prepared a health and safety policy, record these as part of it.</p>

## APPENDIX A

Safety signs and signals must comply with the requirements of the Health and Safety (Safety Signs and Signals) Regulations. Examples of the specified categories are shown below:

Details	Meaning or purpose	Example	Instruction or information
<p>Circular shape</p> <p>Black pictogram</p> <p>Red edging and diagonal line</p>	Prohibition sign		Signs prohibiting behaviour likely to increase or cause danger
<p>Triangular shape</p> <p>Black pictogram</p> <p>Yellow background</p>	Warning sign		Signs giving warning of a hazard or danger
<p>Circular shape</p> <p>White pictogram</p> <p>Blue background</p>	Mandatory sign		Signs making certain actions or behaviour compulsory
<p>Rectangular or square shape</p> <p>White pictogram</p> <p>Green background</p>	Emergency escape First-aid sign		Signs giving information on emergency exits, first-aid, or rescue facilities
<p>Rectangular or square shape</p> <p>White pictogram</p> <p>Red background</p>	Firefighting signs		Provides information on the identification or location of firefighting equipment

Further information is available at [www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/books/l64.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/books/l64.htm).

## Want to know more?

Further useful resources are available at  
[www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/priced/l64.pdf](http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/priced/l64.pdf)

**Note:** if you are in Ireland, Northern Ireland, Jersey, Guernsey or the Isle of Man, then regional variations might apply. In this instance, you should check the guidance provided by the Enforcing Agency for your region. This will be freely available on their website.

## Risk advice line

(provided by Ecclesiastical professionals or external specialists)

Phone: **0345 600 7531**

Email: [risk.advice@ecclesiastical.com](mailto:risk.advice@ecclesiastical.com)

Risk specialists are on hand to advise you on a range of topics, including:

- property protection, security, business continuity planning
- health and safety, food safety, environmental management
- construction safety, fire safety, occupational health, water safety or asbestos.

Available Monday to Friday 9am – 5pm (excluding public and bank holidays).

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