



4. Fire - Risk Assessments & Planning - Fire Alarm Zone Plan Update & Verification

Category:	Fire
Subcategory:	Risk Assessments & Planning
Frequency:	Yearly
Status:	Best Practice
Type:	Competent Person
Priority:	Recommended
Commonality:	Common

Note: This document provides guidance to support compliance but is not a substitute for professional advice.

Why This Task Matters

Your careful maintenance of accurate fire alarm zone plans ensures that emergency services and staff can respond effectively to alarms, protecting every person in the building. By keeping these plans current amid the frequent layout changes in educational settings, you demonstrate your crucial role in maintaining emergency preparedness and building trust in the school's safety systems. Your attention to this detail, often unnoticed by others, is essential for safeguarding pupils and staff during critical moments.

Task Summary

Best Practice: The fire alarm zone plan must be reviewed and updated annually to ensure it reflects the current building layout. This involves comparing the existing plan with the actual building configuration, identifying any discrepancies due to classroom reconfigurations, new partitions, or equipment installations. The verification process includes walking through each zone to confirm detector and call point locations match the plan, checking zone descriptions are accurate and clear, and ensuring the plan shows current escape routes and assembly points. If classrooms, labs, or offices have been reconfigured, outdated plans can mislead staff or fire services during an evacuation. In educational settings, this is vital for effective emergency response in high-occupancy areas. The

update process includes marking changes on the plan, adding verification notes, and ensuring the document remains clear and usable. Evidence produced includes the updated zone plan with current layout and equipment locations, verification notes documenting the review process and any changes found, and marked floor plans showing the current building configuration.

Relevant Legislation & Guidance

- **Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005:** Requires adequate fire detection and warning systems with accurate documentation
- **Fire Safety: Approved Document B (Buildings other than dwellinghouses):** Provides guidance on fire alarm systems and documentation requirements
- **British Standard BS 5839: Fire detection and fire alarm systems for buildings:** Specifies requirements for fire alarm zone plans and documentation
- **British Standard BS 9999: Fire safety in the design, management and use of buildings - Code of practice:** Includes guidance on emergency planning and documentation
- **Health and Safety at Work Act 1974:** General duty to provide adequate safety information and emergency procedures

Typical Frequency

The fire alarm zone plan should be reviewed and updated annually, or sooner if there are significant changes to the building layout. In educational settings, this annual review is typically conducted during school holidays when building modifications are most likely to occur. However, more frequent updates may be needed in schools undergoing major refurbishment, those with flexible classroom spaces, or institutions with rapid curriculum changes requiring equipment modifications. Any building reconfiguration, addition of new detectors, or changes to escape routes should trigger an immediate plan update regardless of the annual schedule.

Applicability

This task is recommended for all educational establishments with fire alarm systems, which is common in virtually all schools and colleges. It is particularly important in schools that frequently reconfigure spaces, have multiple buildings, or undergo regular refurbishment. The task applies to all premises with fire detection systems requiring zone plans, including classroom blocks, sports facilities, laboratories, and residential accommodation. While not statutory for all premises, it is essential best practice for ensuring effective emergency response in educational settings.

Responsible Persons

- **Task Type:** Competent Person

- **In-House Requirements:** This task can be completed by facilities staff or fire safety officers who have received appropriate training in fire alarm systems and building layout documentation. Staff should be familiar with the school's fire alarm system and building configuration.
- **Permit to Work:** No permit to work is typically required for this verification task.
- **Delivery Model:** Normally completed in-house by trained facilities staff, though external assistance may be needed for complex systems.

Key Considerations

- **Timing considerations:** Schedule during school holidays when building changes are more evident
- **Cost implications:** Minimal cost if completed in-house, or £300-£800 if external assistance is required
- **Resource requirements:** Access to current building plans and fire alarm system documentation
- **Potential disruption:** Minimal disruption as this is primarily a documentation review
- **Risk assessment requirements:** Findings should inform updates to the fire risk assessment

Task Instructions

Prerequisites & Safety

- Ensure access to current building plans and existing zone plan
- Confirm familiarity with the fire alarm system layout and operation
- Gather information about any recent building modifications
- Ensure safe access to all areas for verification walk-through

Tools & Materials

- Current building plans and floor layouts
- Existing fire alarm zone plan for comparison
- Pencil, eraser, and correction fluid for updating plans
- Measuring tape for verifying detector locations
- Camera for documenting current layout
- Fire alarm system documentation and manuals

Method (Step-by-Step)

Phase A: Preparation and Review

1. Gather current building plans, existing zone plan, and system documentation
2. Review records of any building modifications since last update
3. Identify all fire alarm zones and their designated areas
4. Prepare to conduct systematic walk-through of each zone

Phase B: Verification Walk-Through

1. Visit each zone systematically, starting from zone 1
2. Verify detector and call point locations match the plan
3. Check zone boundaries correspond to actual room configurations
4. Confirm zone descriptions are accurate and clearly understood
5. Note any discrepancies between plan and actual layout
6. Photograph areas where changes have occurred

Phase C: Documentation Update

1. Mark all identified changes on the zone plan
2. Update zone boundaries to reflect current building layout
3. Add verification notes documenting the review date and findings
4. Ensure all changes are clearly marked and dated
5. Review completed plan for clarity and accuracy

Measurements & Acceptance Criteria

- Zone boundaries must accurately reflect current building layout
- Detector and call point locations must be correctly marked
- Zone numbering must follow logical progression
- Plan must be legible with clear symbols and annotations

If Results Fail

Follow instructions on the Compliance Pod task completion form to record remedial/follow up actions and generate Reactive Task Tickets as required. Immediately update any critical inaccuracies that could affect emergency response. Escalate significant layout changes to facilities management for review. Arrange for contractor assistance if system modifications are needed.

Reinstatement & Housekeeping

No reinstatement required as this is a documentation task. Ensure all documentation is filed appropriately.

Completion Checks

Verify that the updated plan accurately reflects the current building layout. Confirm that all changes are clearly marked and dated. Ensure verification notes document the review process comprehensively.

Record-Keeping & Evidence

- **Upload Process:** Upload any required statutory or supporting evidence to the corresponding task form in Compliance Pod.
- **Statutory Evidence:** No statutory evidence is required for this task.
- **Supporting/Good Practice Evidence:** The updated zone plan, verification notes documenting the review process, and photographs of layout changes support audit readiness.

Common Pitfalls & Best Practice Tips

- **Common mistakes to avoid:** Failing to check recent building modifications, not updating plans immediately after changes, or creating plans that are too complex to use in emergencies
- **Best practices for efficient completion:** Maintain current building plans, conduct reviews during holiday periods, and involve staff familiar with recent changes
- **Pro tips for educational settings:** Coordinate with estate management for notification of layout changes, train staff on plan interpretation, and keep laminated copies in key locations
- **Warning signs that indicate problems:** Multiple zones showing the same location, unclear zone boundaries, or plans that don't match visible room configurations

Quick Reference Checklist

- Current building plans obtained
- Existing zone plan reviewed
- Systematic walk-through of all zones completed
- Discrepancies between plan and actual layout identified
- Plan updated with all changes marked
- Verification notes documenting review process

- Evidence uploaded to Compliance Pod

Grouped Tasks

Grouping is feasible; align with related tasks of the same frequency and contractor visit.

Related Tasks

- Fire - Risk Assessments & Planning - Risk Assessment Review & Renew
- Fire - Risk Assessments & Planning - Compartmentation Survey
- Fire - Risk Assessments & Planning - Stopping & Service Penetration Inspection
- Fire - Risk Assessments & Planning - Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan (PEEP) Review
- Fire - Risk Assessments & Planning - Generic Emergency Evacuation Plan (GEEP) Review
- Fire - Risk Assessments & Planning - Fire Logbook Review & Update
- Fire - Risk Assessments & Planning - Arson Risk Assessment & Perimeter Security Review
- Fire - Risk Assessments & Planning - Fire Safety Management Policy Review

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Users must ensure that all tasks are carried out in line with current legislation, manufacturer instructions, site-specific risk assessments, and organisational policies. Where necessary, professional advice should be sought from competent and accredited specialists — for example, fire risk assessors, water hygiene consultants, electrical engineers, gas safety contractors, or health and safety advisors.