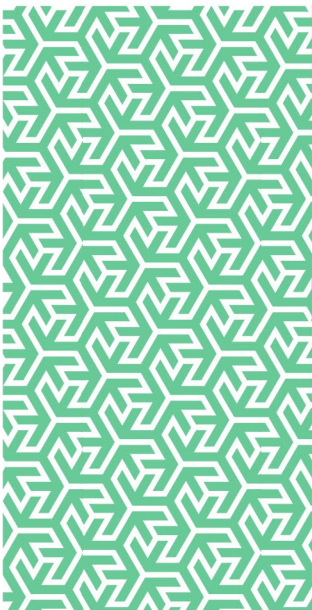



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Risk Control

WFH Series: Office Chairs and Fire Safety



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Risk Control

WFH Series: Office Chairs and Fire Safety

Introduction

Today, many organisations are likely to have continued with hybrid working models that were adopted during the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020. Hybrid models are relatively dynamic in nature and allow employees to split their working time between the office and their home location. These hybrid models are likely to result in office equipment including chairs being required within employee homes.

It is important to note that fire safety standards differ between chairs manufactured for office environments and those intended for domestic settings.

Office Chairs – Fire Safety

Upholstered furniture intended for domestic settings should only contain filling materials that are specified within the Furniture and Furnishings (Fire) (Safety) Regulations 1988¹ (FFFSR 1988). Furthermore, permanent covers should comply with the provisions of the Furniture and Furnishings (Fire) (Safety) Amendment Regulations 1989² and 2010³.

Among other things, domestic chairs must meet specified ignition requirements in respect of filling materials, must be cigarette resistant, and display a permanent label depicting compliance with within FFFSR 1988.

If the chair meets the requirements of FFFSR 1988, they are likely to be acceptable in all premises.

However, within England and Wales, furniture (including chairs) manufactured for non-domestic environments fall within the jurisdiction of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005⁴, which requires employers to conduct fire risk assessments and remove or reduce the risk of fire as far as is reasonably practicable and provide general fire precautions to deal with any possible remaining risk.

In Scotland the duty to carry out a Fire Risk Assessment is imposed on employers by the Fire (Scotland) Act 2005⁵, which requires that the risk assessment identifies any risks to the safety of employees in respect of harm caused by fire in the workplace.

The levels of ignition resistance required would be determined after completion of the fire risk assessment with specific consideration given to the risk level of the environment in which the furniture is to be located. For example, office environments are considered to be lower risk environments in general terms than environments, such as hotels or hostels, where sleeping may be expected.

Non-domestic furniture is required to meet British Standard 7176:2007 (BS 7176) Specification for resistance to ignition of upholstered furniture for non-domestic seating by testing composites⁶, however, the standard describes four different

hazard levels for non-domestic furniture and describes differing tests for evaluating furniture materials intended for 'low hazard', 'medium hazard', 'high hazard' and 'very high hazard' environments.

While there is no mandatory requirement placed upon manufacturers to label products under BS 7176, it is prudent for them to do so in order to ensure the furniture is not moved to a higher risk category environment for which it was not designed.

Summary

Clearly, the regulations which relate to furnishings differ between non-domestic and domestic premises. The consequences of this may be that office chairs found in the home may not be as fire resistant as chairs designed specifically for use in the home.

Employers who have or who may supply chairs to employees working at home must ensure that the chairs meet the Furniture and Furnishing (Fire Safety) Regulations 1988 (as amended in 1998 and 2010).

If any supplied chairs do not meet the above regulations then a programme of chair replacement should be considered. In order to minimise risk during the replacement programme, the following actions should be considered:

- Keeping the chair away from naked flames such as candles or matches
- Avoiding smoking in or around the chair
- Keeping the area around the desk clear
- Making sure cables are not frayed or damaged
- Turning laptops and monitors off when not in use
- Ensuring smoke alarms are located on each level of the home and are tested weekly
- At night, turning off lights and electrical items, closing doors to prevent the spread of fire and maintaining an escape plan in the event of fire breaking out.

References

1. The Furniture and Furnishings (Fire) (Safety) Regulations 1988. Available at:
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/1988/1324/contents/made>
2. The Furniture and Furnishings (Fire) (Safety) (Amendment) Regulations 1989. Available at:
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/1989/2358/made>
3. The Furniture and Furnishings (Fire) (Safety) (Amendment) Regulations 2010. Available at:
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2010/2205/contents/made>
4. The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. Available at:
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2005/1541/contents/made>
5. Fire (Scotland) Act 2005. Available at:
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2005/5/contents>
6. BS 7176:2007 Specification for resistance to ignition of upholstered furniture for non-domestic seating by testing composites. Available at:
<https://shop.bsigroup.com/ProductDetail?pid=000000000030240949>.

Further information

For access to further RMP Resources you may find helpful in reducing your organisation's cost of risk, please access the RMP Resources or RMP Articles pages on our website. To join the debate follow us on our LinkedIn page.

Get in touch

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