

► Written by **Indepth Hygiene Services**

hidden danger

Richard Norman, managing director of Indepth Hygiene Services Ltd, looks at why grease extract systems are a fire hazard and advises on what action to take

With the new Fire Safety Order (the Regulatory Reform [Fire Safety] Order 2005) coming up to its first anniversary in October, it seems timely to check out how well those responsible for the safety of building occupants, particularly in hospitals, have complied with its requirements.

IMPORTANT CHANGES

This legislation introduced some important changes. The most significant was to transfer the responsibility for checking that all possible precautions and actions had been taken to protect building occupants from the dangers of fire away from fire authorities and onto the shoulders of those responsible for buildings or premises. Fire authorities now act as “policemen” with powers to inspect premises to ensure appropriate fire prevention measures and means of escape have been taken.

Under previous Fire Regulations, it was a requirement to prepare fire risk assessments, however there were no real sanctions in place to make sure there was compliance.

The new legislation has teeth. Should there be a fire and it is found that fire risk assessments have not been carried out the person or persons responsible for the safety of building occupants could face personal liability claims in the event of a fire, and in cases where there was injury or death, likely criminal prosecution.

HIDDEN DANGER

As managing director of a leading fire prevention company, I have been talking to fire authorities about the level of compliance with the new legislation. It is clear that performance is uneven. Some hospitals have carried out thorough risk assessment programmes and put in place sound and appropriate fire prevention and escape procedures. However, even in hospitals where fire risk awareness is high and action plans are meeting the demands of the legislation, one potentially high risk installation is often overlooked – the grease extract system linked to the catering facilities.

In the past there was clearly a lack of awareness of the inherent dangers in these systems, often because extract ducting runs above ceilings and behind walls. The major fire at Heathrow, and in hotels and



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restaurants, helped to raise awareness about the potential risk, but my surveyors still come across instances where facilities and building managers believe that the kitchen canopies comprise the grease extract system.

RAISING AWARENESS

It was clear from my discussions, that fire authorities are fully aware of the potential fire dangers in grease extract systems. Several have gone on record as saying that in many buildings these systems represent the greatest potential fire risk to building occupants. The risk is easy to understand.

Grease-laden fumes from the cooking operation accumulate on the internal surfaces of the ducting (the source of combustion) requiring only a spark or flame from cookers or fryers (the source of ignition) to set fire to the grease deposits.

HIGH FIRE RISK

Hospitals are particularly high risk because extract ducting from the kitchens often runs behind walls or ceilings through patient occupied areas. Undoubtedly there is a need for hospital management to ensure that

thorough fire risk assessment procedures are in place and that the kitchen is included in those assessments, particularly the grease extract systems beyond the canopies.

PREVENTION

My company is assisting hospital management meet their legal obligations by carrying out system surveys free of charge. The resulting reports provide management with evidence of the presence of any fire risk and describe what action needs to be taken to safeguard patients, visitors and staff. Specialist cleaning can then be carried out to eliminate any identified risks and a plan put in place to ensure that the system is fire hazard free at all times. □

► FOR MORE INFORMATION

To arrange for a free survey contact Richard Norman, Managing Director of Indepth Hygiene Services Limited on:
Tel: 0208 661 7888
Fax: 0208 661 7506
Email: ductclean@indepthhygiene.co.uk
Web: www.indepthhygiene.co.uk