

<b>Health and Safety Executive</b>		<b>Operational Circular</b>	
		<b>OC 212/1</b>	
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See OC 212/1 Supplement 1

Target Audience:  
All Inspectors

**THE HEALTH AND SAFETY (SAFETY SIGNS AND SIGNALS)  
REGULATIONS 1996 (SI No 1996 341)**

This OC introduces the Health and Safety (Safety Signs and Signals) Regulations 1996. A free advisory leaflet for small firms, IND (G) 184 L *Signpost to the Health and Safety (Safety Signs and Signals) Regulations 1996* (file 212) which helps to explain the Regulations and a priced guidance booklet (L64) is available.

**BACKGROUND**

1 The Health and Safety (Safety Signs and Signals) Regulations 1996 (the Safety Signs Regulations) implement the Safety Signs Directive (92/58/EEC), adopted on 24 June 1992. They replace and revoke the Safety Signs Regulations 1980, which implemented Directive 77/576/EEC. The new Directive (92/58/EEC), and hence the new Regulations, go well beyond the requirements of the original both in scope and detail, and detail and standardise safety signs throughout the Member States.

**SCOPE**

2 The Safety Signs Regulations apply to all premises and activities where workers are employed, but exclude signs used for the regulation of road, rail, inland waterway, sea or air traffic and those used in the marketing of dangerous substances, products and equipment. However, the Regulations require the use of road traffic signs, as prescribed in the Road Traffic Regulations Act 1984, where necessary. Unlike the earlier Regulations, they also apply offshore.

3 The Regulations do not apply to the self-employed, and they do not require employers to provide signs to warn non-employees (eg visitors). However, in both these cases employers or the self-employed still have to meet their duties under HSW Act s.3 and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 (Management Regulations) reg.12 regarding the provision of information on the risks to the health and safety of

non-employees. They may find the signs in the new Regulations helpful in meeting these general duties.

### IMPLEMENTATION

4 The Regulations cover: definition of a safety sign, application of the regulations, provision and maintenance of signs, information, instruction and training, transitional provisions, and enforcement. They also include acoustic signals (including verbal communication), illuminated signs, and hand signals. The signs to be used appear in schedule 1 of the Regulations, which also permits slight variations provided the meaning is the same. If there is no suitable signboard employers are free to design their own provided it conforms to the general principles set out in schedule 1.

5 The Regulations and duties on employers in respect of safety signs came into effect on 1 April 1996. There was no transitional period for safety signs already in place on that date and no changes were required for existing safety related signs. In the case of fire safety signs, however, a transitional period applied and signs had to conform to the Regulations by 24 December 1998.

### GENERAL

6 The Regulations require employers to ensure that safety signs are provided (or are in place) and maintained in circumstances where risks to health and safety have not been avoided by other means, eg engineering controls or safe systems of work. Employers will need to take into account the results of risk assessments made under the Management Regulations. Having taken the control measures identified in the assessments a significant 'residual' risk may remain such that employees need to be warned and informed of further necessary safety measures. Safety signs are needed if they will help to reduce this 'residual' risk but are not a substitute for other control methods. The regulations do not require safety signs to be used where there are no significant risks to health and safety.

7 These Regulations replaced the Safety Signs Regulations 1980, but they did not require changes to safety related signs existing at that time.

### FIRE SAFETY

8 The Safety Signs Regulations apply in relation to general fire precautions as well as to safety issues and for fire safety signs pictograms are now included. Text-only 'fire exit' signs had to be supplemented or replaced by pictogram signs by 24 December 1998. The requirements for fire safety signs and safety signs (shapes, colours and layouts) are outlined in BS 5499:2002, which has replaced BS 5378.

### APPLICATION OFFSHORE

9 The Regulations apply to work activities carried out in British territorial waters and on designated areas of the UK Continental Shelf as listed in the Health and safety at Work etc Act (Application Outside Great Britain) Order 1995. This includes offshore installations, wells, pipeline works and activities connected with installations and wells such as construction, loading and unloading of supply vessels and diving operations offshore. On offshore installations the emergency warning arrangements including alarms and safety signs are covered in the Offshore Installations (Prevention of Fire and Explosion, and Emergency Response) Regulations 1995.

## ENFORCEMENT

10 In relation to safety signs, enforcement of the Safety Signs Regulations fall to HSE and local authorities as governed by the Health and Safety (Enforcing Authority) Regulations 1989. In relation to fire safety signs, notwithstanding the Health and Safety (Enforcing Authority) Regulations 1989 reg.3, HSE will enforce:

- (1) in premises where the Fire Certificates (Special Premises) Regulations 1976 apply; and
- (2) where the Health and Safety at Work etc Act (Application Outside Great Britain) Order 1995 applies.

In all other cases, enforcement of fire safety requirements will fall to the relevant fire authority (see para 12).

11 New safety signs may need to be erected under these Regulations. Although this is only likely in a small number of cases, and only if justifiable on grounds of residual risk, inspectors should note that reg.4 calls up the risk assessment duties under the Management Regulations. There may also be cases where safety signs in use do not follow the pattern specified in the Regulations. Where inspectors encounter either of these cases the new signs should be put up at the earliest opportunity.

12 These Regulations, for the most part, deal with measures to further reduce risks that are already low. Implementation and enforcement by inspectors should reflect the level of risk and inspectors should refer any enquiries relating to fire safety signs to the relevant forcing authority for fire safety, that is, to fire officers, environmental health officers or building control officers of local authorities.

Version 1 - 5 June 1996

Version 2 - 9 March 2004

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### ASI headings

Fire: Health and Safety (Safety Signs and Signals) Regulations 1996: safety signs: signals: signs.

