

The Health and Safety (Safety Signs and Signals) Regulations 1996

Why do we need these Regulations?

These Regulations bring into force the EC Safety Signs Directive (92/58/EEC) on the provision and use of safety signs at work. The purpose of the Directive is to encourage the standardisation of safety signs throughout the member states of the European Union so that safety signs, wherever they are seen, have the same meaning.

Some examples of the most commonly used signs appear in this here:



General danger



Ear protection must be worn



Industrial vehicles



Eye protection must be worn

The Regulations cover various means of communicating health and safety information. These include the use of illuminated signs, hand and acoustic signals (eg fire alarms), spoken communication and the marking of pipework containing dangerous substances. These are in addition to traditional signboards such as prohibition and warning signs. Fire safety signs (ie signs for fire exits and fire-fighting equipment) are also covered.

What do the Regulations require?

They require employers to provide specific safety signs whenever there is a risk that has not been avoided or controlled by other means, eg by engineering controls and safe systems of work. Where a safety sign would not help to reduce that risk, or where the risk is not significant, there is no need to provide a sign;

- They require, where necessary, the use of road traffic signs within workplaces to regulate road traffic;
- They also require employers to:
 - maintain the safety signs which are provided by them,
- explain unfamiliar signs to their employees and tell them what they need to do when they see a safety sign.

The Regulations apply to all places and activities where people are employed, but exclude signs and labels used in connection with the supply of substances, products and equipment or the transport of dangerous goods.

Do existing signs need to be changed?

In the case of fire safety signs, where employers decide that a previously acceptable sign is not of a type referred to in the Regulations they have until 24 December 1998 to replace it. All other safety signs now need to meet the requirements of the new Regulations described below.

Effect on employers

A new requirement in the Regulations is to mark pipework containing dangerous substances, for example by identifying and marking pipework at sampling and discharge points. The same symbols or pictograms need to be shown as those commonly seen on containers of dangerous substances, but using the triangular-shaped warning signs, eg:



Corrosive material



Flammable material



Explosive material



Toxic material

For most firms already using safety signs to warn and instruct employees of risks to their health and safety these Regulations are unlikely to impose any significant changes, because:



No access for pedestrians



Safety helmets must be worn



Marking for dangerous locations



No smoking

- the signboards specified in the Regulations are already covered by the existing British Standard BS 5378:Parts 1 and 3:1980 *Safety signs and colours*. Most of these are already widely used. Some of the most commonly used signboards are shown here;
- existing legislation already requires suitable illuminated signs and acoustic signals to be used where necessary. There will be few other cases where these are needed, fire warning systems being one example
- although the Regulations specify a code of hand signals for mechanical handling and directing vehicles, they permit other equivalent codes to be used such as BS 6736:1986 *Code of practice for hand signalling for use in agricultural operations*, and BS 7121:Part 1: 1989 *Code of practice for safe use of cranes*;
- dangerous locations (eg where people may slip, fall from heights, or where there is low headroom) and traffic routes may need to be marked to meet requirements under the Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992. The new Regulations specify the type of marking to be used, which again is consistent with BS 5378;
- although these Regulations require stores and areas containing significant quantities of dangerous substances to be identified by the appropriate warning sign (the same signs as are used for marking pipework) they will mainly impact upon smaller stores. This is because the majority of sites on which 25 tonnes or more of dangerous substances are stored can be expected to be marked in accordance with the Dangerous Substances (Notification and Marking of Sites)

Regulations 1990. These have similar marking requirements for storage of most dangerous substances. Stores need not be marked if:

- they hold very small quantities;
- the labels on the containers can be seen clearly from outside the store.

Fire safety signs

Advice on the use of fire safety signs can be obtained from your enforcing authority for fire safety (eg the local fire authority). In general these Regulations will not require any changes where existing fire safety signs **containing symbols** comply with BS 5499:Part 1:1990 *Fire safety signs, notices and graphic symbols* (perhaps in order to comply with the requirements of a fire certificate). This is because the signs in BS 5499, although different in detail to those specified in the Regulations, follow the same basic pattern and are therefore considered to comply with the Regulations.



A Typical sign in Regulations:



B Typical BS5499 sign:

(Both **A** and **B** are acceptable)

Fire warning systems

Where evacuation from buildings is needed, the Regulations require the fire alarm signal to be continuous. Fire alarms conforming to BS 5839: Part 1:1988 *Fire detection and alarm systems for buildings* do not need changing, nor do other acceptable means such as manually operated sounders (eg rotary gongs or handbells).