The Fire Brigades Union (FBU) has announced that there will be national strikes by its membership.

North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service (NYFRS) will continue to provide emergency fire and rescue cover during any strike though the level of response may be more limited than at other times.

The 999 system will continue to operate as normal, however our resources may be stretched and there may be a delay in attending automatic fire alarms unless it is confirmed as a fire.

Please be aware that during strike periods it is possible that attendance times to some incidents may be increased. The emergency crews attending may have fewer specialist skills and may not be familiar with either the incident site concerned or local geography.

Whilst industrial action does not increase the risk of a fire occurring, your vigilance and good management can reduce that risk.

**Advice to businesses**

The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 places a legal requirement upon employers and people with responsibility for premises to ensure fire safety. These responsibilities and safety measures are designed to protect life regardless of fire service intervention. Operators of premises which comply with the law should be able to continue their activities unaffected by the dispute.

Business owners and managers should check to make sure that:

- the fire risk assessment for the premises is up to date and has been acted on
- measures to reduce the risk of fire are in place and are working
- fire precautions in the building are working
- the emergency plan is up to date and appropriate to ensure evacuation in case of fire without the need for fire service assistance
- all staff know what to do in case of fire.

Briefings for senior staff, a review of risk assessments and communication of your emergency plan information are key factors in preparation and response during the dispute.

You are advised to check the arrangements you have in place, make any necessary adjustments and ensure that staff and residents are aware of the risk reduction measures for the premises and the actions they should take in case of fire.

**What can you do?**

We strongly recommend that organisations should also consider any additional measures they can put in place to prevent fire and limit damage if a fire does occur. This will assist in protecting staff and visitors and with achieving compliance with existing legal duties.

As part of this you should consider the implications of, and risks associated with, the potentially reduced emergency services response and where appropriate institute extra measures and arrangements to prevent incidents and minimise the consequences of reduced emergency response cover.

For more fire safety advice and support visit [www.northyorksfire.gov.uk](http://www.northyorksfire.gov.uk)
Examples of such measures include:

- delaying certain activities if they have an increased risk of fire associated with them
- rescheduling deliveries of flammable substances to coincide with periods when full emergency response cover is available
- lowering inventories of substances/items that are flammable or toxic.

However, businesses should ensure that such measures do not increase the risks of an incident of another nature; for example, delaying the welding of a pipe decreases the risk of fire but might result in the collapse of the weakened pipe-work.

**Business continuity and fire safety checklists**

Accountable senior managers are urged to check their organisation's preparedness and to review their contingency arrangements. Existing risk registers and risk assessments may be useful to identify and prioritise action.

To support you in your business continuity plans, your fire safety arrangements and your premises emergency plan, North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service has compiled the following checklists.

**Your Business Continuity plan checklist:**

- Ensure that someone has responsibility for checking the management of your fire risks and is doing so.
- Have the risks from fire been properly assessed and prioritised? Do these include risks to assets and business as well as risks to safety?
- Are there nominated staff to manage any emergency situation and limit damage?
- Is there a business recovery plan in place and is it up to date?
- Are key records, emergency plans and contact details duplicated off site?
- Is there a detailed emergency fire plan in place? Is this up to date and has this been brought to the attention of all staff?
- Are all key staff aware of their duties and have they been properly trained?
- Have steps been taken to increase management inspections and review security to prevent arson and improve housekeeping?

**Your fire safety checklist:**

- Ensure storage of combustible material and highly flammable substances is appropriate.
- Ensure that you keep quantities of highly flammable material to a minimum.
- Ensure heat sources (naked flame, electrical equipment, welding, grinding, hot light sources etc) are managed and kept away from combustible materials.

**Your existing fire precautions:**

- Ensure that fire exits are all unobstructed and available and that fire alarms and emergency lights are in good working order.
- Ensure that fire resisting doors and shutters are kept closed as far as practicable to limit the spread of fire and smoke.
- Check that appropriate firefighting equipment is available, serviced and ready for use. Automatic suppression systems, e.g. sprinkler installations, should also be thoroughly checked to ensure that they are in proper working order.
- Staged evacuation arrangements involving progressive horizontal evacuation (in hospitals, residential and nursing homes for example) will rely on eventual intervention by the fire service to contain fire at compartment boundaries. Whilst there will be a response during any strike action, further extensive evacuation may be required. Management should consider the need for additional staff resources to allow for this.

- Are arrangements in place (during periods of strike action) to call the fire service by using the 999 system rather than placing reliance on automatic systems?
- Check that key staff can be contacted out of hours if necessary and that sufficient copies of the plan are held in readiness off site.
- Check that all contact details contained in the plans are current and correct.
- Special attention should be given to damage control and salvage arrangements in buildings and those containing business critical processes, information or other resources and in heritage buildings.
- Remind everyone to be vigilant.
confirm staff are fully aware of fire and evacuation procedures.

check that staff know how to raise the alarm and call the emergency services, and are familiar with the location of escape routes and evacuation procedures.

ensure those with mobility difficulties or other special needs are considered and may require special assistance to evacuate safely.

check that senior staff, security personnel, fire wardens, incident control teams etc are aware of their duties in the event of fire.

arrangements should be made for an additional fire evacuation drill to be carried out at an early opportunity to practice the relevant emergency procedures.

Your staff vigilance:

increase the frequency of patrols or inspections to enforce the highest standards of housekeeping. In particular make sure staircases, other escape routes and high fire risk areas are kept free from any accumulation of waste or storage.

to deter fire raising make sure that perimeter security is sound and that materials stored in the open (including waste) are kept well away from buildings.

particular attention should be paid to the control of activities presenting a high risk of ignition such as smoking and contractors operations involving ‘hot work’, especially any construction work involving blow torches or welding equipment during the dispute.

consider the need for additional staffing or patrols where buildings or parts of buildings remain unoccupied for long periods.

consider the safety/evacuation requirements of disabled people.

Your fire safety at the end of the working day:

are all windows and doors closed, including doors held open by automatic release units?

is unused electrical equipment switched off, and where appropriate, unplugged?

check that smoking materials are not left smouldering.

check that all naked flames are extinguished or left in a safe condition.

ensure all flammable rubbish and waste is removed to a safe place.

check that all highly flammable materials are safely stored.

ensure that the workplace is secured against unauthorised entry.

review arrangements for calling the emergency services in the event of fire.

As automatic fire alarms may be treated as a low priority (unless we receive a backup call stating there is a fire), special care must be taken to minimise the possibility of unwanted automatic fire signals.

check that effective arrangements are in place for a responsible person to meet fire crews on arrival and provide them with appropriate information, for example, the location of the nearest fire hydrant or other water supply.

Your checklist for general fire safety

Fire alarms, warning and detection:

- can the existing means of detection raise an alarm in time for all the occupants to escape safely?
- can the means for giving warning be clearly heard and understood throughout the whole premises when initiated from any single point?
- if the fire detection and warning system is electrically powered, does it have a back-up power supply?
- have you told your employees about your fire warning system - will they know how to operate and respond to it?
- are there instructions for your employees on how to operate the fire warning system?
- have you included the fire detection and fire warning arrangements in your emergency plan?

Your escape plan:

- how long will it take for all the occupants to escape to a place of safety once a fire has been detected and is that a reasonable length of time or will it take too long?
- are there enough exits and are they in the right place?
- are the types and sizes of exits suitable and sufficient for the number of people likely to need to use them?
- in the event of fire, could all available exits be affected or will at least one route from any part of the premises remain available?
☐ are all escape routes easily identifiable, free from any obstructions and adequately illuminated?

☐ have you trained your staff in using the means of escape?

☐ are there instructions for your employees about the means of escape?

☐ have you included means of escape arrangements in your emergency plan?

**Your means of fighting fire:**

☐ are the premises' portable fire extinguishers suitable for the purpose and of sufficient capacity?

☐ are there sufficient extinguishers, hosereels and fire blankets sited throughout the workplace?

☐ have the people likely to use the fire extinguishers been given adequate instruction and training?

☐ are the right types of extinguishers located close to the fire hazards and can users gain access to them without exposing themselves to risk?

☐ are the locations of the extinguishers obvious or does their position need indicating?

☐ have you included the use of firefighting equipment in your emergency plan?

**Emergency plans:**

☐ do you have an emergency plan?

☐ does the emergency plan take account of all reasonably foreseeable circumstances?

☐ are your employees familiar with the plan, trained in its use and involved in testing it?

☐ is the emergency plan made available to all who need to be aware of it?

☐ are the procedures to be followed clearly indicated throughout the workplace?

☐ have you considered all the people likely to be present in your workplace and others with whom you share the building?

**Maintenance and testing:**

☐ do you regularly check all fire doors and escape routes and associated lighting and signs?

☐ do you regularly check all your firefighting equipment?

☐ do you regularly check your fire detection and alarm equipment?

☐ do you regularly check any other equipment provided to help means of escape arrangements in the building?

☐ are there instructions for relevant employees about testing of equipment?

☐ are those who test and maintain the equipment properly trained to do so?

**Lifts:**

☐ ensure that your maintenance contracts for lifts are up to date.

☐ ensure that, in the event of a lift becoming stuck, clear advice is available on how to contact the responsible maintenance company. Calls to the fire service should only be made if people in the lift are at immediate risk or in such distress as to need medical attention.

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