

100% Smoke Free Policy for Building Sites

The recent fire on the construction site in Essex lead to the discussion on smoking on building sites. On the 18th August at approximately 11.20 am the three storey council building in Debden was set on fire. The reason for the blaze is not yet confirmed.

In 2007 the smoke-free legislation was launched in the UK to ban smoking in all enclosed workplaces and public spaces. On construction sites, main contractor is responsible to display warning notices. Local authorities are enforcing the legislation and can issue fines for not adhering to it. Health and Safety Executive (HSE) requires from employers to reduce the risk to health and safety including from second-hand smoking.

- Employers should have a specific policy on smoking in the workplace.
- Smoking policy should give priority to the needs of non-smokers who do not wish to breathe tobacco smoke.
- Employers should consult their employees and their representatives on the appropriate smoking policy to suit their particular workplace.

The principal contractor should set the rules, but usually smoking is banned on most of building sites due to various flammable materials stored. In such circumstances, there might be the separated area for smoking during the break or workers have to leave the site and smoke outside. Moreover, smoking is prohibited in the cabs of heavy construction equipment, both owned or rented. There should be a designated person who will ensure workers compliance with the site smoke free policy.

Contractor have to display a no smoking sign

in the building site and make sure workers do not smoke in enclosed areas. No smoking signs should be placed at every entrance to a public site and the structure under construction. On a private residential project, signs must be posted once the structure under construction becomes enclosed. The building is considered enclosed as long as it has ceiling or roof and walls, whether on a permanent or temporary basis. Businesses can be fined up to £2,500 if they do not stop workers from smoking and up to £1,000 for lack of information on a site. Workers can be fined up to £200.

Smoking might be allowed on a private construction sites in the open area or outside the structure on the private area if the owner has not declared it smoke-free. Smoking in the enclosed structure will be prohibited.

Banning smoking on the construction sites

is the common industry practice. It often includes also vaping, so called e-cigarette smoking. E-cigarettes are battery operated devices without the smoke but the vapour acts like it. Often contractors are implementing the smoke and vapour free policies on their sites. Careless smoking could cause fire as construction site is packed with paint, chemicals and flammable products. Moreover, smoking might lead to the productivity losses. Workers who smokes before and after work plus during breaks only tend to be more efficient. Productivity losses due to smoking 5-7 cigarettes a day are larger than due to sick leaves. It is worth to educate labourers about the risk of careless smoking on site and financial fines.

