

The cost of fire in any commercial or industrial premises can be significant. Firstly, there are the direct costs of losses incurred through damage from fire, smoke, heat and water. These could include the cost of damage to the contents of a building, but also the added costs of damage to vehicles, data storage systems and the structural integrity of the building itself. Naturally, the main concern will always be life safety, and if people are killed or injured, this will be the greatest loss in immediate terms and with longer term consequences for the employer and the community.

Indirect costs however are much greater and often affect the local community in less obvious ways. Many businesses do not survive for long after a severe fire and the likelihood of closure increases significantly, where adequate plans for business continuity had not been prepared in advance. This can place financial burdens on the local economy in the form of unemployment, increased insurance premiums and reduced investment, not to mention the overall degradation of the local environment, when a building is left vacant and boarded up.

The Risk Based Inspection Programme (RBiP) aims to protect commercial and industrial premises in the West Midlands by ensuring that premises that have an increased likelihood of fire, or a higher risk to numbers of occupants, are subject to targeted fire safety audits and inspections.

The system works by allocating each of the commercial premises across the brigade a risk score based on the likelihood of a fire occurring as well as the severity of its potential effects. This is calculated using a wide range of factors including, for example, risk to life and existing standards of fire safety management.

These scores are then used to create a priority list, with those premises that have a high risk score at the top and those with a lower risk score being targeted less frequently for re-inspection. The list is then used to drive the activity of our Fire Safety Officers in carrying out fire safety inspections, thus ensuring that sites that present the greatest risk are being inspected sooner and more frequently than those of lower risk.

Dependant on the existing effectiveness to which the risk is being managed, a fire safety inspection can result in advice being given or, in more serious cases, enforcement action being taken in order to improve fire safety arrangements at any particular site.

This risk based inspection process not only helps to reduce the risk of fire in individual premises (and the potential costs to the local economy associated with a commercial fire), but it also contributes to the reduction of the overall risk in West Midlands business community, helping to secure the on-going success of local enterprise and safeguarding the jobs of those employed.