Fire Hazards and Good Housekeeping

You need to become familiar with fire hazards at your place of work. Any threat to fire safety is referred to as a fire hazard. It includes a situation that:

- Increases the likelihood a fire may start.
- Impedes escape in the event a fire occurs.
- Causes a fire to spread easily.

This document outlines a few examples.

Fire Hazards

**Smoking** is now not allowed in any workplace and therefore, should not pose a threat as a fire hazard within any workplace, however, people, whether they are service users, residents, children under care etc., will still try and smoke as they may disregard the authority of the law. These persons should be supervised at all times if they are under your care and you should also constantly be on guard for illegal smoking within your workplace.

**Matches and lighters** can also cause a hazard in the wrong hands.

**Cookers, hobs and cooking appliances** should be kept clear of any combustibles – even when not in use.

**Cooking pots** etc., should be removed from the cooking hobs when heated and they should be constantly supervised when cooking.

**Heating boilers** are usually very hot and therefore, there should be no storage of combustibles close to or on top of any heating boilers. Boiler and plant rooms should be kept clear of combustibles at all times.

**Portable heaters** are usually very hot and therefore, heaters should not be positioned close to curtains, furniture or combustibles and on no account should combustibles be allowed on top of the heaters. Portable heaters must not under any circumstances be plugged into an extension cable.

**Paper storage** – whether on a desk, in an office or within archive stores – paper should always be kept neat and tidy with clear access to and egress from all areas. There should be no form of hot surfaces close to the storage of paperwork – i.e. naked light bulbs or machinery which can radiate heat or require ventilation to keep cool.
If **medical oxygen** is used in the workplace then the room where the oxygen is used should be clearly indicated on the room door. Any storage of oxygen cylinders should not be stored or kept within a stairway or an escape route such as a corridor. Any storage of oxygen should be within a cupboard to which the door to the store is clearly marked highlighting the storage of oxygen. The location of the oxygen should also be highlighted on the fire plan for the workplace.

All **furnishings** within the workplace should be fire retardant. Fire retardancy just means that you cannot ignite the material with a cigarette, however, if a flame is applied for a certain time and there is air in the room even fire retardant material will continue to burn.

Only small amounts of **paint** (one or two tins of paint) should be allowed within the workplace. Large amounts of paint stored should be removed.

**Petrol** should not be allowed within premises. Vapour is always given off petrol. A spark from a mobile phone or an electric appliance or light switch could easily cause an explosion, therefore, petrol should always be stored in a well ventilated area – outside the building.

**Gas cylinders** should never be stored inside buildings. If there was a fire and the gas cylinders become involved in the fire it may cause an explosion.

**Vending machines, fax and photocopying machines** are another source of ignition and should not be allowed in escape routes such as corridors and stairways.

Small **rubbish bins** within offices should be regularly emptied to reduce the amount of loose rubbish.

**Waste bins** should not be stored close to any building for the fear of arson.

**Electrical equipment, hoists, electric chairs and chargers** should not be allowed to be used or stored within escape routes such as corridors or stairways as they can not only cause an obstruction but are a source of ignition.

**Office desk lamps** positioned too close to other equipment or paperwork can cause fires.

**Bare light bulbs** within small cupboards can also cause fires if positioned close to combustible material such as paper and linen etc. Bare light bulbs should have a protective cover and never be allowed to be close to combustibles.
Good Housekeeping

Be on the look out for:

**Locked doors within the escape routes.** Remember – all doors within an escape route all the way to open air must never be locked with a key. All doors should open from within - without the use of a key.

**Wedges** – A fire door should never be wedged open. It is against the law to wedge a fire door open.

**Fire doors not closing properly on to their door stops.** There are a number of reasons why fire doors become faulty – i.e. catching on new carpet, self closing device has become faulty or has been disconnected, hinge is loose, the door becomes warped due to being wedged open all the time.

**Blocked exit routes.** Escape routes such as corridors should always be kept clear of combustibles and obstructions.

**Exit signs not clearly seen.** Curtains can cover the exit signage or workmen may have removed them during re-decoration.

**Emergency lights not working.** There is a small LED light (either red or green) usually indicating the light is working properly. If the LED light is out the light will not work when required.

**Holes in walls and ceilings.** Remember – smoke and heat will spread easily.

**Used or damaged fire extinguishers.** All extinguishers have ‘tamper’ seals fitted. If the tamper seal is missing or broken then the extinguisher may not work when required.

If you notice any of the above – inform the person in charge immediately.