

Business co-operation



The EU wide network of Euro Info Centres (EICs) is the European Commission's

official business information network, established to provide advice and assistance to small and medium-sized businesses trading in Europe. EICs are an invaluable source of information for any business, whatever its size or industry sector.

Through the extensive network of contacts in the EU countries and beyond as well as many years of experience, EIC staff are able to provide up-to-date, reliable and accurate information highlighting business opportunities, identifying customers or suppliers, accessing European legislation, standards and public sector tenders.

If you are interested in seeking business opportunities and co-operation with potential trading partners in other EU countries, the Euro Info Centre Network can help you, either with a search of the co-operation database and/or by entering your company profile into the database.

For further information about the EIC network as well as news, an archive of business opportunities and the location of EICs in the UK, visit www.euro-info.org.uk

Online fraudsters sting South West internet users

South West internet users who have experienced online fraud lost an average of £499 each over the past 12 months, according to 'Internet Safety: The State of the Nation' research by the government and industry online safety campaign, Get Safe Online (www.getsafeonline.org).

A survey of South West internet users found that 14% had experienced online fraud in the last year. In that time, 8% of all South West internet users suffered fraud while shopping online, 4% experienced another form of general online fraud and 5% were subject to bank account or credit card fraud as a result of activity online).

The Get Safe Online research said that if internet users took the same precautions online that they do on the high street, a substantial proportion of online fraud losses could be prevented.

The changing face of fire safety legislation



It's difficult to imagine that there is anyone left in Britain who isn't yet aware of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order. But the fact is that the single biggest reform of Fire Safety Legislation this century has left businesses and employers confused and frustrated. Many smaller businesses still don't think the new rules apply to them.

The aim was to consolidate more than 70 different pieces of legislation under one, all encompassing Order. No more "excluded" premises, no more Fire Certificates – we should actually be embracing the simplicity of the new law.

OK, so it does shift the emphasis for responsibility for Fire Safety from the fire brigade to the employer but is that so wrong? Putting out fires is what the fire brigade do (and they do it well), but surely preventing the need for their attendance should be our number one priority. We are, after all, on site all the time, fully aware and in control – aren't we?

In simple terms, the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order directs you to appoint somebody on site to be "responsible" for all aspects of Fire Safety. This would include equipment, routines and procedures, and for the safety of people who work from, reside at or visit your premises. This is the person the fire



- 36,000 workplace fires every year
- 30 people die
- 2,500 people are injured
- Average economic cost of fire: £34,400 (per business)
- 70%-80% of fire-damaged businesses fail within three years of experiencing a fire.

brigade will want to talk to as and when they visit to inspect and enforce.

The "responsible person" must conduct a detailed Fire Risk Assessment and, if five or more people are employed, the significant findings must be recorded in writing. The rest of the Regulations apply to the outcome of the Fire Risk Assessment.

Don't see Fire Risk Assessment as just another EU intrusion into our business, if we look at it as the most valuable safety learning curve we will undertake this decade then maybe we will see a genuine reduction in fire-related loss, injury and death.

Nik Heath, director of Fire Risk Assessment who provide a complete self assessment tool for £30 is offering Business West members a 10% discount. The Fire Risk Assessment tool is endorsed by fire brigades and is used by the St. Paul International Insurance Company Ltd for its clients.

For more information visit: www.fra.uk.com

Do you know who you really are?

Commercial law firm Beachcroft LLP is launching a unique service to help South West organisations investigate their corporate history, assess ongoing liability and protect themselves against potential claims.

The Bristol-based firm is using the expertise of specialist partners to research and develop 'corporate family trees' for organisations, including the history of any acquisitions, mergers and disposals along the way. The aim is to identify any past issues or liabilities that could result in unexpected claims against the business further down the line.

"When an organisation acquires another business, it may also inherit its history – which in some cases could involve potential unidentified liabilities," explained regional senior partner Michael Bothamley.

"Companies can be completely unaware of these risks and, more worryingly, be unaware that there may be a hidden liability. By using the expertise of our integrated teams, including litigation, corporate finance, and health and safety specialists, we can delve deep into the history of any company and develop a very extensive 'corporate family tree'."

For more information visit www.getsafeonline.org

Counting the days till we're smoke-free

From 1 July 2007 virtually all enclosed public places and workplaces in England will become smoke-free by law.

Bristol is leading the way as the country prepares for the big day, and on March 23 – 100 days before July 1 – a countdown clock was unveiled near the Podium in Broadmead.

Bristol has already taken major steps towards becoming a smoke-free city. Research has shown that:

- Bristol pubs are ahead of many other cities in preparing for smoke-free policies
- The nine major public sector employers in Bristol have completely smoke-free policies
- The number of employees in non-food businesses regularly or sometimes exposed to secondhand smoke at work has decreased by several thousand.

Dr Hugh Annett, Director of Public Health in Bristol said: "Smoke-free public places and workplaces will protect everyone from the harmful effects of secondhand smoke when they are working, socialising and relaxing, and will help those that want to quit smoking by creating more supportive environments."

The countdown clock serves as a reminder to businesses that they need to prepare for the legislation on July 1. Employers, managers and those in charge of smoke-free premises and vehicles will need to:

- Display 'no smoking' signs in smoke-free premises
- Take reasonable steps to ensure that staff and customers are aware that premises and vehicles are legally required to be smoke-free
- Ensure that no one smokes in smoke-free premises or vehicles.

Businesses may also want to consider taking the following steps to ensure they are ready:

- Removing ashtrays from smoke-free areas
- Developing a smoke-free policy in consultation with staff



Dr Hugh Annett, Director of Public Health in Bristol and Councillor Barbara Janke with the countdown clock

- Providing staff and customers with support to quit smoking
- Ensuring that staff and customers know where they can smoke if they choose to.

Councillor Barbara Janke added: "I am confident that businesses in Bristol will do everything they can to fully comply with the law by July 1. We will be running a series of seminars for businesses and providing advice and support on matters such as their legal requirements, displaying no-smoking signs and how to ensure their smoking shelters comply with planning regulations."

One such seminar will take place on 9 May at Bristol Zoo Gardens, when delegates will have the opportunity to ask questions and speak to council officers, smoking advice staff and community police. More information can be obtained from John Conrad at Bristol City Council, Public Health and Safety Team on 0117 922 33 24 or email: john.conrad@bristol.gov.uk.

Smokefree England has produced information for businesses which is available on www.smokefreeengland.co.uk or on the information line 0800 169 1697.

No butts – we need to clean up our act

Every day a staggering 122 tonnes of cigarette butts, packets and matches are dropped on the UK's streets – a figure that has risen by 20% over the last four years.

And the news that the Government is proposing to make businesses legally liable for such litter outside their offices and other premises indicates that a further increase in litter levels is recognised as an unintended consequence of the forthcoming smoking ban.

Charles Hamshaw-Thomas of Bath-based consultancy CSR Solutions, said: "Following the Irish ban in 2003, cigarette litter on Dublin's streets rose by nearly 20% in the



first year. Towns and cities from across the world, including the USA, Canada, New Zealand and many European countries are reporting similar experiences."

Mr Hamshaw-Thomas believes there is a solution to the problem, but it requires a mix of public education and the provision of suitable disposal resources.

"It's simple – people will respond if they're made aware of this issue and have the means of disposal. Otherwise they'll carry on flicking their butts," he said.

"Without action now, we're likely to see further rises in the current £400 million national street cleaning bill each year, and a further significant reduction in the environmental quality of our cities, towns and villages."