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# Examiners' Report

## NEBOSH INTERNATIONAL CERTIFICATE IN FIRE SAFETY AND RISK MANAGEMENT

### UNIT IFC1: INTERNATIONAL FIRE SAFETY AND RISK MANAGEMENT

**SEPTEMBER 2017**

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# Introduction

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NEBOSH (The National Examination Board in Occupational Safety and Health) was formed in 1979 as an independent examining board and awarding body with charitable status. We offer a comprehensive range of globally-recognised, vocationally-related qualifications designed to meet the health, safety, environmental and risk management needs of all places of work in both the private and public sectors.

Courses leading to NEBOSH qualifications attract around 50,000 candidates annually and are offered by over 600 course providers, with examinations taken in over 120 countries around the world. Our qualifications are recognised by the relevant professional membership bodies including the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH) and the International Institute of Risk and Safety Management (IIRSM).

NEBOSH is an awarding body that applies best practice setting, assessment and marking and applies to Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) Accreditation regulatory requirements.

This report provides guidance for candidates and course providers for use in preparation for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding of the syllabus content and the application of assessment criteria.

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## General comments

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Many candidates are well prepared for this unit assessment and provide comprehensive and relevant answers in response to the demands of the question paper. This includes the ability to demonstrate understanding of knowledge by applying it to workplace situations.

There are other candidates, however, who appear to be unprepared for the unit assessment and who show both a lack of knowledge of the syllabus content and a lack of understanding of how key concepts should be applied to workplace situations.

This report has been prepared to provide feedback on standard date IFC1 examination sat in September 2017.

Feedback is presented in these key areas: responses to questions, examination technique and command words and is designed to assist candidates and course providers prepare for future assessments in this unit.

Candidates and course providers will also benefit from use of the 'Guide to the NEBOSH International Certificate in Fire Safety and Risk Management' which is available via the NEBOSH website. In particular, the guide sets out in detail the syllabus content for IFC1 and tutor reference documents for each Element.

Additional guidance on command words is provided in 'Guidance on command words used in learning outcomes and question papers' which is also available via the NEBOSH website.

Candidates and course providers should also make reference to the FC1 'Example question paper and Examiners' feedback on expected answers' which provides example questions and details Examiners' expectations and typical areas of underperformance.

## Unit IFC1

### International fire safety and risk management

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<b>Question 1</b>	(a)	<b>Outline</b> how suitable wall lining materials could help minimise the risk from fire.	<b>(3)</b>
	(b)	<b>Identify</b> types of wall lining material that could be used on a means of escape.	<b>(5)</b>
	(c)	<b>Outline</b> how compartmentation in a building may be compromised.	<b>(5)</b>
	(d)	<b>Describe</b> how a fire may spread to a neighbouring building.	<b>(3)</b>
	(e)	<b>Outline</b> means of preventing a fire from spreading to a neighbouring building.	<b>(4)</b>

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This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of learning outcomes 4.1: Outline the means of fire protection and prevention of fire and smoke spread within buildings in relation to building construction and design; and 2.4: Describe the principles of fire growth and fire spread.

This question assessed candidates understanding of wall lining materials and their significance with regards fire risk, compartmentation and fire spread between buildings. There was a mixed response to parts of the question. Part (a) was not well answered with many candidates stating that lining materials should have a low combustibility but not going on to outline how this can reduce fire risk, for example because such materials would limit the rate of surface spread of flame.

Part (b) was well answered with many candidates giving a range of suitable materials that can be used on means of escape resulting in many being awarded more than half marks.

Part (c) was a practical question and many candidates had little trouble giving a reasonable range of means by which compartmentation can be compromised such as fire doors being wedged open and damaged fire-resistant glazing.

Part (d) was also reasonably well answered with many describing ways in which a fire could spread to a neighbouring building such as burning embers and sparks travelling across to another building.

Part (e) was not as well answered with candidates having difficulty giving practical measures that can help prevent fire spread between buildings such as fire resistant construction of external walls. Many candidates instead gave more generic answers such as carrying out a fire risk assessment without specifying the types of control measures that may result from the assessment.

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- Question 2** (a) **Outline** possible financial implications of high numbers of false fire alarm activations in a workplace. (4)
- (b) **Outline** possible adverse effects on the behaviour of occupants of a workplace during a fire alarm where there has previously been a number of false fire alarm activations. (4)
- 

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of learning outcomes 1.1: Outline the moral, social and economic benefits of good management of fire safety; and 5.3: Outline the perception and behaviour of people in the event of a fire.

Part (a) of this question asked for a range of financial implications if there were large numbers of false fire alarms in a workplace and was not well answered by many candidates. Most gave business disruption as a valid implication but did not give a wider range to include, for example, higher damages and losses as a result of a delayed reaction to a real fire incident. Candidates should take note of the number of marks available for each part of questions to determine the number of distinct points required to gain high marks.

Part (b) was better answered with many candidates being awarded half marks or more for giving a suitable range of effects of behaviour where there has been a high number of false fire alarms previously.

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- Question 3** **Outline** issues to be considered when carrying out a risk assessment of dangerous substances. (8)
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This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 6.3: Outline matters to be considered in a risk assessment of dangerous substances.

This question was not well answered. The majority of candidates gave a generic answer detailing the five steps of a risk assessment which was not asked for. Better answers were those outlining issues that are more specific to dangerous substances that are taken into account by a risk assessment such as the hazardous properties of the substances and the likelihood that an explosive atmosphere could occur. Candidates are reminded to read and re-read questions carefully to help reduce the chance of misinterpreting questions.

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- Question 4** During a shop fire, the evacuation of personnel was delayed. The fire risk assessment was reviewed and an absence of fire drills was identified.
- Outline** reasons for conducting fire drills in a workplace. (8)
- 

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 5.2: Describe the development and maintenance of a fire evacuation procedure.

The use of fire drills in workplaces should be familiar to many candidates and this question assessed their understanding of why drills should be carried out. Most candidates gave good answers with a wide range of relevant reasons provided such as to enable people to practice evacuation procedures so they are more likely to react quickly and calmly in a real fire evacuation.

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**Question 5**     **Identify** information that may be contained in a fire log book. **(8)**

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This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 1.6: Explain the requirements for recording and reporting fire related incidents.

This question assessed candidates' knowledge of information kept in fire log books and was well answered. Most answers identified a good range of relevant points such as emergency numbers and records of fire alarm tests.

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**Question 6**     **Give** the meaning of the following terms:

(a)     flashpoint; **(2)**

(b)     auto-ignition temperature; **(2)**

(c)     upper flammable limit (UFL); **(2)**

(d)     lower flammable limit (LFL). **(2)**

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This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 2.2: Explain the principles and conditions for the ignition of solids, liquids and gases.

This question assessed candidates' knowledge of a number of technical fire safety related terms. Candidates had difficulty giving clear and accurate definitions of the terms, for example many did not state that the upper and lower flammable limits relate to concentrations of a flammable substance in air.

Candidates are advised to ensure they have a clear understanding of technical terms such as these and to liaise with their course providers if they feel they do not understand them.

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**Question 7**     **Outline** how the improper use of electrical equipment can cause electricity to act as an ignition source. **(8)**

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This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 3.1: Explain the causes of fires and explosions in typical work activities.

Candidates had difficulty outlining how electrical equipment can cause electricity to act as a source of ignition. Many answers had only a limited range of points made and of those many described various types of electrical equipment that may be involved in fire rather than how they can start fires if misused. Relevant points that were missing from most answers included using coiled extension cables and fitting incorrect fuses in equipment increasing the risk of overheating and sparking if an electrical fault developed.

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- Question 8**
- (a) Using a practical example, **give** the meaning of the term 'hazard' in respect of fire safety. (2)
  - (b) **Outline** how the following can contribute to the identification of fire hazards in a workplace:
    - (i) workplace inspections; (2)
    - (ii) job/task analysis; (2)
    - (iii) talking to workers. (2)
- 

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of learning outcomes 6.2: Outline the principles and practice of fire safety risk assessments including principles of prevention (measures to remove and reduce risk); and 6.1: Explain the aims and objectives of fire safety risk assessments.

While many candidates knew the definition of 'hazard' few gave a suitable fire-related example. Often candidates had no difficulty outlining how talking to workers can help identify fire hazards but many gave limited answers regarding workplace inspections and task analysis. Few candidates showed knowledge that job and task analysis involve breaking a task into each component parts so they may be examined in turn.

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- Question 9** **Outline** the content of a fire training course for fire marshals in an organisation. (8)
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This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 5.4: Outline appropriate training requirements.

This question was not well answered with most candidates giving a limited range of points that were also not given in appropriate depth for an 'outline' question. It is important that candidates write answers in sufficient depth as required for the command word used, help in this can be found in the NEBOSH guidance on command words and further on in this report. In addition, some answers gave very generic points rather than points more specifically related to fire marshal training, such as the purpose of the fire marshal's role and how to usher people out of a building to the assembly point.

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- Question 10**
- (a) **Give** the meaning of the following terms:
    - (i) deflagration; (2)
    - (ii) detonation. (2)
  - (b) **Identify TWO** common types of material that may be involved in explosions **AND**, in **EACH** case, **give** an example. (4)
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This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 2.5: Outline the principles of explosion and explosive combustion.

Most candidates seemed to understand the terms used and were consequently awarded good marks in part (a). However, many answers for part (b) were not as well answered, as although many candidates knew types of materials that could be involved in explosions they could not give suitable examples.

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**Question 11**   **Outline** key features of a fire safety policy.

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**(8)**

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 1.2: Outline the key features of a fire safety policy.

This question was not well answered by most candidates. Many seemed to misinterpret the question and outline the steps involved in carrying out a fire risk assessment rather than features of a fire safety policy such as detailing the organisation and arrangements for ensuring fire safety.

Candidates are advised to read and re-read each question in the examination to help avoid such misinterpretations.

## Examination technique

The following issues are consistently identified as the main areas in need of improvement for candidates taking Certificate level qualifications:

### Candidates misread/misinterpreted the question

Candidates misreading or misinterpreting the question is by far the most common cause of candidates not gaining the maximum marks available.

NEBOSH questions are systematically and carefully prepared and are subject to a number of checks and balances prior to being authorised for use in question papers. These checks include ensuring that questions set for the Certificate level qualifications relate directly to the learning outcomes contained within the associated syllabus guides. The learning outcomes require candidates to be sufficiently prepared to provide the relevant depth of answer across a broad range of subject areas. For example, a candidate could be asked about the causes of stress, or could be asked about the effects of stress. A question could require a response relating to the principles of fire initiation, or a question could require a response relating to the spread of fire. Therefore, a candidate should focus not only on the general topic area (eg stress, fire) but also the specific aspect of that subject to which the question relates.

Candidates must also pay attention to the command word. For example, a question could ask candidates to **identify** the hazards associated with demolition work', or a question from the same element could ask candidates to **outline** the control measures required during demolition work'. Candidates appear to focus solely on the object of the question (demolition) and do not pay sufficient attention to the subject (hazards or control measures in the examples given) or the command word ('identify' or 'outline' in the examples given). There is often some confusion between hazard and risk. If a question requires an outline of hazards for a given situation, candidates must be careful not to provide risks, or even in some circumstances precautions, as they will not be able to attract marks.

Examiners suggest that while many candidates do begin their answer satisfactorily and perhaps gain one or two marks, they then lose sight of the question and include irrelevant information. Although further points included in an answer can relate to the general subject area, these points are not focused on the specific learning outcome and marks cannot be awarded. However, some candidates appear to misread or misinterpret several questions. This situation is more likely due to candidates preparing for the examination with a number of memorised answers obtained through rote-learning, that again can provide answers that are loosely associated with the subject matter but do not provide answers specific to the question. Such an approach is clearly evident to an Examiner and demonstrates little understanding of the subject matter and marks are not awarded.

Candidates are advised to allow sufficient time to read and re-read the question in order to determine the key requirements prior to committing their answer to paper. Preparing a time plan before the examination will indicate how many minutes are available for each question and then part of this time allocation can be given to reading the question. Underlining or highlighting key words can assist in keeping focused on the salient points and simple mind maps or answer plans can also be useful. Maps and plans should be kept simple so as not to use up too much examination time.

### Candidates did not respond effectively to the command word

A key indicator a question will be the command word, which is always given in **bold** typeface. The command word will indicate the depth of answer that is expected by the candidate and relates to the amount of detail that should be included in each point of the answer.

The learning outcomes in each element of all syllabus guides include the relevant command word that dictates the level of detail that should be covered in a course of study and the depth of answer that a candidate would be expected to provide in an answer to an examination question.

Examiners report that candidates continue to incorrectly observe the command words and therefore compromise their ability to gain the marks available. The majority of cases where command words are not observed relate to insufficient detail being given by a candidate in their examination answer. A significant number of candidates, irrespective of the command word given in the question, provide all answers in the form of a brief list of one or two words. This would normally not be sufficient to gain marks where the command word given was 'outline', 'explain' or 'describe', all of which require answers of more than one or two words.

Some candidates do provide too much information, which would not be required where a command word limits the expected answer to 'give' or 'identify'. Candidates would not be penalised for providing excessive detail but this would not be an efficient use of the time allocated.

Course providers should ensure that learning materials complement the command words in the syllabus guide and the NEBOSH guidance on command words and that sufficient time is given to advising candidates on suitable examination technique during a course of study.

### **Candidates unnecessarily wrote the question down**

Developing a time plan is a key element in preparing for an examination. Advice included on Certificate question papers suggests that 30 minutes should be allocated for the answer to the long 20-mark question, and 90 minutes should be allocated to the answers for the remaining ten, 8-mark short questions. Therefore there are around 9 minutes available to answer an 8-mark question. This time will be required for reading the question properly at least twice, developing an answer plan, and then committing the answer to paper while regularly referring back to the question in order to maintain focus. Therefore any inefficient use of this time should be avoided.

The efficient use of this time is essential in order to ensure that all questions can be answered within the 2 hours available. Many candidates feel it necessary to write out the question, in full, prior to providing their answer and although this practice will not lose marks it will lose valuable time. A significant number of candidates do not answer all of the questions in the time permitted and do not complete the question paper, some of whom obviously run out of time.

### **Candidates provided rote-learned responses that did not fit the question**

It is clear that there are a significant number of candidates who seem to recite answers in the examination that have been rote-learned in advance and do not answer the question.

While knowledge of material forms a part of the study for a Certificate-level qualification, a key aspect being assessed is a candidate's **understanding** of the subject and reciting a pre-prepared and memorised answer will not show a candidate's understanding. In fact, if a candidate gives a memorised answer to a question that may look similar, but actually is asking for a different aspect of a topic in the syllabus, it shows a lack of understanding of the subject and will inevitably result in low marks being awarded for that answer.

### **Candidates repeated the same points but in different ways / Candidates provided the same answer to different questions**

There are instances where candidates repeat very similar points in their answers, sometimes a number of times. This is easily done in the stressful environment of the examination. However, once a point has been successfully made and a mark awarded for it, that mark cannot be awarded again for similar points made later in the answer.

Candidates are advised to practise examination technique in their preparations to avoid this kind of pitfall. Writing an answer plan where points can be ticked off when made, or structuring an answer so that each point made is clearly shown, for example by underlining key points, can be of great use. This technique aids candidates and makes it much clearer in the stress of the examination for candidates to see which points have been made and reduce the chances of the same point being made several times.

### **Candidates did not answer all of the questions**

It has been noted that a number of candidates do not attempt all of the questions and of course where a candidate does not provide an answer to a question, no marks can be awarded. This seriously affects the potential marks available and the possibility of achieving a pass. Course providers must emphasise the importance of attempting all questions in order to maximise the opportunity to attract marks.

There can be several reasons for this issue: running out of the allocated time for the examination, not knowing the answer to the question, or forgetting to answer a question.

Questions can be answered in any order and answers can be written in any order in the answer book provided. Candidates are advised to clearly keep track of questions they have attempted, such as

marking them on the question paper that would minimise the risk of inadvertently missing a question to answer.

If the subject of the question is unfamiliar or the answer is not known, then it will be challenging to provide an answer. This can result from rote-learning and preparing for an examination with a number of memorised answers, or simply not being adequately prepared for the examination across the breadth of the syllabus. There is always the risk of a candidate 'going blank' in an examination situation, in which case candidates should be prepared with some techniques to help. Rather than trying to remember what was taught or what has been read, ask yourself 'what would I do, in this situation?'. Reference to personal application or experience is sometimes enough to stimulate an answer that otherwise may have been missed. Alternatively, candidates can go back to first principles and break a question down into elements such as 'people', 'equipment', 'materials' and the 'working environment'. Approaching a question in small sections can minimise the risk of being overwhelmed by it as a whole.

Running out of time can be avoided by having an examination time plan and working to it. The question paper advises that you should spend 30 minutes on the long answer (question 1) and 90 minutes on the remaining ten short answer questions. This will provide around 9 minutes per short answer, follow the clock and when the time per question has expired, move on. Answering a question partly is better than not answering at all.

### **Candidates did not allocate enough time to the question / Time management**

In a number of cases question 1 is left until last or later in the question paper and does not appear to be answered completely. Other candidates appear to rush the last one or two questions by providing very brief or bullet point answers, even when these questions require an outline. This indicates a lack of time management. It is advised that course providers and candidates spend time developing the skill of writing answers to questions bearing in mind the number of marks and time available. A 20-mark question requires significantly more detail than an 8-mark question.

Candidates might benefit from writing abbreviations to save time and to recognise that there is no need to write out the question at the beginning of their answer. Standard abbreviations such as HSE, RIDDOR, COSHH, PPE and DSE are acceptable.

### **Candidates' handwriting was illegible**

Sometimes Examiners have difficulty in reading the handwriting of some candidates. Although allowances are made for candidates under the pressure of an examination, course providers must remind candidates that their writing needs to be legible or valuable marks may not be picked up during marking.

There is a minimum literacy requirement for candidates on NEBOSH qualifications. As stated in the syllabus guides the standard of English required by candidates studying for Certificate level must be such that they can both understand and articulate the concepts contained in the syllabus.

NEBOSH recommends to accredited course providers that candidates taking this qualification should reach a minimum standard of English equivalent to an International English Language Testing System score of 6.0 or higher in IELTS tests in order to be accepted onto a Certificate level programme.

For further information please see the latest version of the IELTS Handbook or consult the IELTS website: <https://www.ielts.org/about-the-test/test-format>

Candidates wishing to assess their own language expertise may consult the IELTS website for information on taking the test: <https://www.ielts.org>

Course providers are reminded that they must ensure that these standards are satisfied or additional tuition provided to ensure accessible and inclusive lifelong learning.

## Command words

Please note that the examples used here are for the purpose of explanation only.

### Outline

The command word 'outline' is by far the most challenging for candidates. Referring to the NEBOSH guidance on command words available on the NEBOSH website, 'outline' means *"To indicate the principal features or different parts of"*.

Many candidates do not give sufficient detail in order to warrant an 'outline' answer. The NEBOSH guidance on command word states that *"an exhaustive description is not required. What is sought is a brief summary of the major aspects of whatever is stated in the question"*.

If the use of the command word in everyday language or conversation is considered it may help the candidate understand what is required. If asked to '**outline** the risks to an operator when manually closing a valve' an answer such as 'cuts, bruises, burns and strains' would be insufficient as this represents a listed answer. However, 'cuts from contact with sharp edges of the hand wheel, bruises from impact with adjacent plant items, burns from contact with adjacent uninsulated pipe work and strains from using excessive force' would be sufficient.

### Explain

The command word 'explain' requires the candidate to provide an understanding of the subject of the question and will usually be used in conjunction with 'why' or 'how'. Such as '**explain** how an interlocked guard operates' or '**explain** why a forklift truck may overturn'.

Some candidates approach an 'explain' question the same as an 'outline' and provide a number of individual points rather than providing an explanation as to how something operates or why something occurs. While some candidates do answer such questions sufficiently and satisfactorily, other candidates have difficulty in explaining in a logical sequence and many repeat the same point.

### Identify

'Identify' questions require the name or title of an item, such as, '**identify** the effects of electricity on the human body', or '**identify** the features of a vehicle route'. In most cases one or two words will be sufficient and further detail will not be required to gain the marks.

For example, if asked to '**identify** types of equipment found in an office' appropriate answers could be personal computer, printer, telephone, photocopier, etc. There would be no need to embellish those points with a description of the equipment or its function.

However, in contrast to 'outline' answers being too brief, many candidates feel obliged to expand 'identify' answers into too much detail, with the possible perception that more words equals more marks. This is not the case and course providers should use the NEBOSH guidance on command words within their examination preparation sessions in order to prepare candidates for the command words that may arise.

### Describe

The command word 'describe' clearly requires a description of something. The NEBOSH guidance on command words says that 'describe' requires a detailed written account of the distinctive features of a topic such that another person would be able to visualise what was being described.

If asked to describe the clock in the examination room, a person would have little difficulty in doing so and would most probably refer to its shape, its size, the colour of the clock and the style of numerals. Answers to such a question would almost certainly not result in general unconnected information about clocks, the history of clocks, or an explanation of why the clock is present in the room. Candidates should consider the general use of the command word when providing examination answers.

## **Give**

'Give' questions require a statement that is relevant to the subject asked for in the question but additional explanation is not required. Often, 'give' questions ask for the meaning of a particular term. While detailed explanation of the application of the term would not be required, a correct knowledge of the term itself is needed in order for the Examiner to award marks.

For additional guidance, please see NEBOSH's '*Guidance on command words used in learning outcomes and question papers*' document, which is available on our website: [www.nebosh.org.uk/students/default.asp?cref=1345&ct=2](http://www.nebosh.org.uk/students/default.asp?cref=1345&ct=2).