



Safety Matters

Issue 3, September 2009

Fire: Prevention is better than cure

A fire can occur at any time as the picture opposite shows. Last year there were 37 fires at the University: 4 in academic/admin buildings and 33 in halls. If you were to ask anyone involved whether they expected their fire to occur when it did, their answer would probably be a resounding NO!

The causes of fires in the University are varied but have previously included electrical faults, equipment failure, chemical reactions, unattended experiments, supplementary heating, not to mention the cooking and candles left unattended in residences. The pictures in this edition of Safety Matters show some of the damage which has occurred.



Fire at a weekend when an experiment was left unattended. Fire detection and prompt action prevented the outcome being much worse.



Clock shows the time this fire occurred.

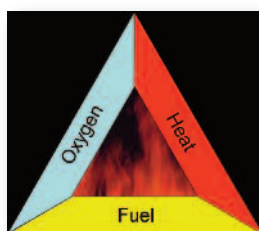
Fire Prevention

Whilst it's important to know what action to take in the event of a fire happening, it is much more important to think about what must be done to prevent a fire occurring in the first place.

Have you considered whether fire is a potential hazard associated with your work activities and taken appropriate action to control those risks?

The Fire Triangle

If one of the three elements in the fire triangle below is absent then a fire cannot start.



This issue of Safety Matters mainly focuses on **Fire Safety** including:

- Fire prevention
 - Be prepared!
 - Fire evacuation practices
 - Evacuation marshals
- Plus the Myth of the Month

FUEL + HEAT + OXYGEN = FIRE!

Oxygen: Usually present in the atmosphere, so there may be little that can be done to control or eliminate it. Therefore you should focus on the other two elements of the triangle and think of ways to eliminate or control them.

Fuel sources: Combustible materials are found almost everywhere and are many and varied, e.g. lab chemicals & gases, cleaning solvents, paper/cardboard, wood, fine dust. Consider whether these can be removed from the workplace altogether. If not, can you keep the quantities held to a minimum? Ensure potential fuel sources are correctly and, where necessary, securely stored at all times.

Heat: The source of heat could come from many diverse sources e.g. naked flames, static electricity, direct sunlight, equipment, heating systems, sparks, etc. Think about how your heat sources could ignite any fuel present. Remove or segregate the sources of ignition from the fuel.

These actions will go a long way to reduce the likelihood of a fire starting and controlling or minimising its spread.

Be prepared: a fire will not wait until you think you are ready to deal with it!

Ensure you know what to do when a fire alarm sounds.

- **Do you know** what your fire alarm sounds like? Is it a bell, a siren; a single or two stage system? When is the weekly test and can you hear the alarm OK?
- **Do you know** how to make safe equipment and experiments?
- **Do you know** where your nearest fire exits are?
- **Do you know** where to assemble once you are outside?

If you don't know the answer to any of these questions, why not find out from your School/Unit Safety Advisor now! Information can also be found on the new Fire Action Notices which are being posted in building foyers and near fire call points.

Ensure you know what to do if you discover a fire.

- **Raise the alarm** by breaking one of the red call points found on main corridors
 - **Ring the Fire Brigade on 9-999** from any internal phone
 - **Leave the building**, closing doors behind you, and when Security and/or the Fire Brigade arrive inform them of the nature of the fire.
- Do not tackle a fire unless it is safe to do so and you are trained to use the equipment provided.

Fire Evacuations and Evacuation Marshals

Each year every building will have a planned fire evacuation practice. This is observed by a member of the Safety Team who reports on the effectiveness of the arrangements and any problems found.

Heads of School/Unit must appoint sufficient STDU-trained Evacuation Marshals to help evacuate their building when the alarm sounds. Marshals should not put themselves at risk in any way but ensure the evacuation proceeds smoothly and quickly, that all people are responding to the alarm, and that the spread of fire and smoke is reduced by closing fire doors as they leave. **If an Evacuation Marshal asks you to leave, you must respond immediately.**

Safety Myths

Myth: You can't wear flip flops to work

The reality

Earlier this year the weather forecasters promised us all a red hot summer. Then they revised their forecast!

However, during warmer weather, many of us think about wearing sandals or flip-flops to work to help us stay cool. The HSE say that 'Despite recent reports to the contrary, health and safety law doesn't ban them.'

That said, we do need to wear footwear which is appropriate for the job we have to do. Flip flops or open toed shoes are not the best choice if there is



Fires in laboratories and student accommodation



It is believed this piece of equipment developed an electrical fault that started a fire which destroyed the laboratory.

The situation was prevented from becoming much worse because

the person who discovered the fire knew exactly what to do: they closed the lab door to contain the fire, activated the building alarm, got out and met the fire brigade with details of the chemicals in the room.

The School had taken the correct action to reduce the risk of fire as the equipment had been maintained as the manufacturer specified and had been regularly tested for electrical safety.

This fire started when a candle was left unattended on a PC monitor in a study bedroom. There was extensive fire and smoke damage to the room.



Cooking is also a cause of fires in halls. If you've been out for a drink and fancy a fry-up afterwards, don't forget to keep an eye on the pan!