

To Vice-Presidents/Deans, Heads of Schools and Research Institutes, HoFAs

From Dr Melanie Taylor

Date 10 May 2010

cc Prof M Case, Prof M Hebbert, Dr D Barker, Mr B Wills, Mr T Graham, School Safety Advisors, Safety Representatives

Reference Safety Circular 5/2010

## Fire safety – management issues identified by fire risk assessments

Action: Senior managers are asked to:

- (1) distribute this circular to all staff and students,
- (2) refer it to their Health & Safety Committee (or equivalent) to consider critically how effectively their School/Directorate implements the actions listed in the Appendix, and
- (3) take action to improve performance where necessary.

The Directorate of Estates manage the contract for the University's fire risk assessments<sup>1</sup>, and many of you will have noticed significant building works in progress now to address some of the findings and recommendations of the assessors. In addition to these improvements to the physical condition of buildings, the recommendations also refer to management issues that often contribute to the initiation of a fire (eg proper procedures for removal of combustible materials) or the safe evacuation of all personnel (eg effective emergency evacuation procedures).

The attached appendix lists the key fire safety management issues covered by the assessments, and the existing responsibilities and actions that should already be in place. Most of these are shared between all occupiers and people with specific roles in Estates, and we all have a role to play.

Safety Services co-ordinates the annual programme of emergency evacuation practices, and this year's report to Fire Safety Advisory Group noted a few instances of teaching staff continuing to teach during an alarm. This is unacceptable, and puts the lives of staff and students at risk. It also gives students the impression that they can ignore all alarms. Staff are reminded that they are individually responsible for their own safety AND the safety of others affected by their acts or omissions<sup>2</sup>; this includes responding appropriately by ensuring that teaching stops as soon as an evacuation alarm sounds, and students are escorted from the premises.

Your USC can provide further guidance and advice.

Dr Melanie Taylor  
University Safety Advisor

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<sup>1</sup> Required by the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005, <http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2005/20051541.htm#1>

<sup>2</sup> Section 7, Health & Safety at Work etc Act 1974

Appendix

Issues	Responsibility	Action to be taken	Monitored by & Frequency
<b>Arson Prevention</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building Occupiers</li> <li>• Security</li> <li>• House Services</li> </ul>	<p>Most University premises with unrestricted access are a potential target for arson. Fires started deliberately can be particularly dangerous because they generally develop much faster and may be intentionally started on escape routes or areas where flammable materials are stored or can accumulate. To reduce the risk of arson attack building occupiers should ensure that: -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• all building entry points are secured at the end of day</li> <li>• combustible rubbish is regularly removed</li> <li>• waste containers / skips are not placed adjacent to buildings</li> <li>• combustible material is not allowed to be stored or to accumulate in corridors and escape routes.</li> <li>• that all storerooms, offices and labs are secure at the end of the day</li> <li>• the availability of easily ignitable materials is limited</li> <li>• staff know how to, and are encouraged to report people acting suspiciously to Security</li> </ul>	<p>Monitored by Security and building users on a day to day basis. Building user groups should monitor arrangements on an annual basis</p>
<b>Housekeeping</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building occupiers</li> <li>• House Services</li> </ul>	<p>The Fire Risk Assessments of all University buildings have identified that housekeeping, and in particular the storage of waste, is a significant problem across the University. The assessments have identified that large amounts of combustible materials can and do accumulate within corridors and circulation areas and this coupled with the lack of a robust security system increases the risk of arson. Other issues identified by the assessments include the use of stairwells, corridors and general circulation areas for storage which can lead to escape routes becoming blocked.</p> <p>Good housekeeping will lower the chances of a fire starting so the accumulation of combustible materials in University buildings should be monitored carefully by building occupiers and excess materials removed / disposed of where necessary. Good housekeeping is essential to reduce the chances of escape routes, signage and information and fire doors being blocked or obstructed.</p>	<p>Monitored by Building Users on a day to day basis. Building user groups should monitor arrangements on a 6 monthly basis</p>
<b>Waste</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building occupiers</li> <li>• House Services</li> <li>• Campus Cleansing</li> </ul>	<p>General waste, waste materials, scrap equipment should not be allowed to accumulate in any University building due to the fire risks associated with storing these items. If building occupiers generate considerable quantities of combustible waste material then they should make arrangements for safe storage or removal on a regular basis as soon as possible.</p>	<p>Monitored by Building Users, House Services and Campus Cleansing on a day to day basis. Building user groups should monitor</p>

		<p>Occupiers should have arrangements in place with cleaning staff and House Services to ensure that waste is regularly removed. Contact details for House Services staff are normally found at building entrances. House Services should arrange for waste to be removed from buildings and Campus Cleansing should arrange for removal from site.</p> <p>Where the location where waste is produced presents a significant fire risk e.g. lab, workshop occupiers should implement close down procedures at the end of the day to ensure that: -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• refuse / waste has been removed from the premises and placed in secure storage</li> <li>• flammable materials are locked away</li> <li>• equipment and machinery is switched off / isolated</li> <li>• valuable equipment is secured</li> <li>• internal doors are closed</li> <li>• external doors have been secured in a manner that does not affect the means of escape for anyone that may use the premises outside of normal working hours.</li> </ul>	arrangements on a 6 monthly basis
<b>Storage (General)</b>	Building occupiers	Many materials found in University premises are combustible and quantities should be minimised. The more combustible materials that are stored in a building the greater the source of fuel for a fire. Poorly arranged storage could also prevent fire detection equipment from working correctly.	Monitored by Building Users on a day to day basis + by regular safety inspections
<b>Storage (Flammable / Explosives)</b>	Building occupiers	<p>Combustible materials are not just those generally regarded as highly combustible but all materials that will readily catch fire. However by carefully considering the type of material, the quantities kept and the storage arrangements, the risks can be significantly reduced. Quantities of flammable liquids or chemicals kept in labs and workshops should be carefully assessed, and when not in use, containers should be correctly separated and stored in proprietary cabinets.</p> <p>COSHH and risk assessments for work should identify the relevant control measures to prevent fire and fore safe storage.</p> <p>If it is necessary to utilise materials such as fuels (whether in containers, cylinders, fuel tanks or machinery), fertilisers, weed killers or paints etc, they should be stored in a secure fire-resisting room with ventilation provided to open air.</p>	Monitored by Building Users on a day to day basis + by regular safety inspections
<b>Equipment and machinery</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building occupiers</li> <li>• Estates maintenance</li> </ul>	<p>Lack of preventive maintenance increases the risk of fire starting in machinery. Common causes of fire in equipment and machinery are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• misuse or lack of maintenance of cooking equipment and appliances;</li> <li>• allowing ventilation points to become clogged or blocked, causing overheating;</li> </ul>	Monitored by Building Users, Estates as part of maintenance regime

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>allowing extraction equipment in catering environments to build up excessive grease deposits;</li> <li>loose drive belts or lack of lubrication leading to increased friction;</li> <li>disabling or interfering with automatic or manual safety features and cut-outs;</li> <li>leaking valves, glands or joints allowing oils and other flammable liquids to contaminate adjacent floors.</li> </ul> <p>All machinery, equipment and plant should be properly maintained by a competent person in accordance with manufacturer's instructions / recommendations.</p>	
<b>Electrical safety</b>	Building occupiers Estates maintenance	<p>Poorly installed and maintained electrical equipment can be a significant cause of accidental fires. The main causes of fire are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>overheating cables and equipment, e.g. due to overloading circuits, bunched or coiled cables or impaired cooling fans;</li> <li>incorrect installation or use of equipment;</li> <li>damaged or inadequate insulation on cables or wiring;</li> <li>combustible materials being placed too close to electrical equipment which may give off heat even when operating normally or may become hot due to a fault;</li> <li>arcing or sparking by electrical equipment;</li> <li>bunched cables passing through insulation or confined spaces which can generate excessive heat;</li> <li>lack of maintenance or testing.</li> </ul> <p>See University guidance on electrical safety for further information, at <a href="http://www.campus.manchester.ac.uk/healthandsafety/CoPs&amp;Guidance/electrical_equipment_maintenance-g.doc">http://www.campus.manchester.ac.uk/healthandsafety/CoPs&amp;Guidance/electrical_equipment_maintenance-g.doc</a></p>	Monitored by Building Users as part of PAT process + via safety inspections. Estates regular building electrical safety inspections
<b>Heating</b>	Building occupiers	<p><b>Heating</b></p> <p>Use of portable heaters, especially those brought from home and not subject to portable appliance checks, can give rise to electrical overload and fire risk.</p> <p>In general, staff and students are prohibited from bringing in their own portable heaters into University premises, and should contact the Estates Helpdesk if temperatures are thought to be too low.</p>	Monitored by Building Users on a day to day basis + by regular safety inspections
<b>Hot Works</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Building occupiers</li> <li>Estates</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hot work, such as that which involves open flame or grinding/cutting wheels should only be carried out by suitably competent personnel.</li> <li>Hot work should only be authorised where a safer method of carrying out the work is not possible or practical.</li> <li>Wherever possible, hot work should be carried out in an area designated for that purpose. It may be appropriate to move the items to be worked on to an existing</li> </ul>	Monitored by Building Users, Estates on a day to day basis + by regular safety inspections

		<p>designated area.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• When hot work is being undertaken in premises fitted with an automatic fire detection system, and there is a risk of the alarm being activated then the zone or detector(s) where the work is being carried out should be isolated to prevent false alarms. The zone should be reinstated as soon as the task has been completed. This must be arranged through Estates.</li><li>• If Schools undertake large amounts of hot work then they should consider implementing a permit to work system to control this type of work.</li><li>• Where hot work is carried out, a nominated person should provide a continuous fire watch during and for at least one hour following each period of work. The individual should monitor and detect any smoldering or fire in the work area and adjoining areas to which sparks and heat may have spread. These areas include floors below and above the work area and areas on the other sides of walls to where the work is being carried out.</li><li>• Liaison should be established in multiple occupancy buildings before major hot work commences to ensure all occupants are aware that hot work is taking place and if necessary arrange alternate access if required to areas adjacent to where work is being undertaken.</li><li>• All hot work carried out by Estates personnel should be controlled by Estates permit to work system.</li><li>• Contractors must be made aware of the University fire safety procedures in place at the premises, and work should not commence unless a hot work permit has been formally issued by Estates / School.</li></ul>	
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