

To Vice-Presidents/Deans, Heads of Schools, HoFAs

From Dr Melanie Taylor

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cc Prof M Case, Prof M Hebbert, Dr D Barker, Dr S A Robson, T Humphreys, B Wills, D Massey, T Graham, R Valentine, M Shore-Nye, School Safety Advisors

Reference Safety Circular 3/2009

Appointment of Evacuation Marshals and other fire issues

Action : HOSs are asked to review the appointments they have made in the light of recent revisions to the University's Fire Safety Procedure, and to monitor the adequacy of these through their school health & safety committee.

On 4th March, the University's Fire Safety Advisory Group (FSAG) considered a discussion paper about the numbers of evacuation marshals being appointed and trained. The paper included an analysis of training statistics and reports from observed evacuation practices. It was noted that there is no known authoritative guidance (such as a British Standard), nor any sector guidance or norm to assist managers in deciding how many marshals they should appoint, and what area they should cover. The FSAG agreed to develop its own criteria, based largely on what is seen as existing good practice in some parts of the campus, and their recommendations have now been accepted by the University's Health & Safety Committee.

These criteria have been incorporated into the University's Fire Safety Procedure at http://www.campus.manchester.ac.uk/healthandsafety/CoPs&Guidance/fire_safety-p.pdf

The key factors to take into account are in para 6, and include:

- aim to appoint sufficient Evacuation Marshals so that each is not delayed in his/her own evacuation by more than one minute;
- the University's adopted best practice is one Evacuation Marshall for every 1,000 square metres of floor space;
- a higher ratio may be needed in areas where special fire risks have been identified and a fire risk assessment shows that this is necessary;
- sufficient Evacuation Marshals to monitor each exit from the building (unless minor exits can be secured from premature re-entry)
- cover for absences.

You may also be able to assess whether sufficient marshals are appointed from reports of the annual observed fire evacuation practices, and any other evacuations during the year.

Changes in risk profile due to changes in occupancy

A recent independent audit of the University's fire safety arrangements highlighted changes in fire risk profile arising from changes in occupancy as an area where arrangements could be improved. 2 such typical cases are discussed below. These are not easy to address, and by their very nature, usually involve transient or short-term conditions.

a) Use of buildings out-of-hours

Between 0900–1700 (approx), most building occupancies will be established and evacuation marshals will be present in reasonably predictable numbers. However, for periods in the early morning, late evening, or during weekends and holidays, people may be present in very low numbers and trained evacuation marshals may not be present at all. It is very important that all staff and students are fully aware that they are responsible as individuals for their own safety, must respond promptly at all times to a fire alarm activation, and are familiar with ALL the exit routes for their building. This awareness should come from their initial induction, their general fire safety awareness training (arranged through STDU), and from routine evacuation practices and efforts within the school to monitor and promote safety. Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans for disabled persons must also take the availability of assistance into account.

b) Use of buildings for events, conferences, widening participation, invited lectures, etc

During these times, occupancy will be more than usual and those present may not be typical of University staff and students or familiar with the building or alarm systems. Visitors may be very young, have disabilities, be assembling in areas not usually used for crowds, etc. The organiser should address the issue of evacuation marshals as part of their risk assessment for the event. This must include a discussion between all the parties about who will provide marshals, and who will brief them about the specific arrangements for the building concerned. Where a school party is accompanied by teachers, for example, it may be appropriate for the teachers to marshal their charges out (as they will know their own children, probably by name, and be known by them as a figure of authority), but the visiting teachers will need information about the alarm sound, exit routes, assembly points, etc. Conference staff may be able to contract Estates personnel from House Services.

PEEPs and Evacuation Chairs

Some schools have asked for clarification in the use of evacuation chairs (such as the Paraid chairs mounted in some stairwells, under a yellow cover). When preparing personal emergency evacuation plans, schools are advised to consider a range of other measures before resorting to the use of emergency chairs, as it is difficult to ensure that trained people are present in the right place at the right time. If the need is justified in a PEEP, requests for training in their use should be directed to STDU.

Multi-occupied buildings

The role of Estates-led building user groups for multi-occupied buildings is being discussed and will be subject to further proposals. There is value of a forum that considers the building as a whole, and can facilitate arrangements between schools and other units.

Your University Safety Co-ordinator can provide further information and guidance.

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