

Laboratory areas

In laboratory areas, the retention of large quantities of flammable liquids or chemicals, especially if not stored in fire-resistant cabinets, can increase the fire hazard. Combustible material should not be stored against electrical equipment or heaters, even if turned off. All flammable and dangerous substances should be correctly stored in accordance with the relevant regulations to that particular substance and preferably locked away in a fire-resistant enclosure.

Steps to be taken for fire protection and prevention

The responsible person acting on the employer's behalf should ensure that:

- exit doors are never obstructed;
- exit doors can be easily opened from the inside;
- exit doors are kept unlocked when the building is in use;
- fire doors are clearly labelled and kept closed at all times but never locked;
- furniture and equipment does not impede escape routes;
- rubbish and combustible materials are disposed of as soon as possible;
- all heaters have a fireguard and are regularly maintained;
- all electrical services and fittings are regularly maintained;
- regulations concerning control and storage of flammable liquids are followed; and
- all notices concerning emergency evacuations and fire prevention procedures are displayed clearly and are updated.

If any of the above steps are not being properly implemented, then the matter should be raised with the responsible person and the NASUWT.

Sprinklers in schools and colleges

The NASUWT is campaigning for the mandatory installation of automatically operated fixed fire suppression systems, such as sprinklers and gas/foam flooding systems, in all new build schools and colleges and where major refurbishment takes place. The Department for Education expects that all new schools should have sprinklers fitted.

Advice and support

For advice and support, contact your NASUWT Local Association or Regional Centre.

Contact details can be found:

- on the NASUWT website at www.nasuwt.org.uk;
- in the NASUWT diary; or
- by phoning 0121 453 6150.

Further information

Detailed information and guidance relating to fire safety procedures, risk assessment and prevention can be obtained from:

The booklet *Fire Safety – Risk Assessment: Educational Premises* is available on the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) website at www.firesafetyguides.co.uk.

The booklet *Fire Safety for Schools* is available on the DfE website at www.education.gov.uk.

Further information is available at www.fire.gov.uk.

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Fire Safety

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This leaflet provides essential information relating to fire safety procedures and prevention.

FIRE SAFETY PROCEDURES

Fire safety policies

The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (RRFS) stipulate that the 'responsible person' (the employer and any other person who may have control of any part of the premises) must provide employees with:

- clear and relevant information on the risks to employees identified by a fire risk assessment;
- the measures taken to prevent fires and how these measures will protect employees if a fire breaks out; and
- appropriate procedures, including fire safety drills, to be followed if a fire breaks out. This usually takes the form of a fire safety policy or procedure.

A teacher should not be the responsible person.

In workplaces employing five people or more, there is a requirement for the above information to be recorded by the employer.

The primary aim of a fire safety procedure must be to safeguard life. Every step must be taken to prevent fire but effective procedures for the evacuation of premises in an emergency are also essential.

Fire drills and the provision of fire safety instruction and information

The responsible person should ensure that:

- all staff are properly instructed and all occupants are informed of the action to be taken in the event of an emergency, such as a fire on the premises;
- clear notices are prominently displayed in every room describing the action to be taken in the event of an emergency;
- where there are five or more employees, appropriate procedures are produced, including safety drills, to be followed in the event of serious and imminent danger to persons on the premises.

The NASUWT recommends that fire drills should be held during normal working hours at least once a term, preferably early in any term when new staff or pupils have joined the school, outside normal working hours for those

who may occupy the building outside normal working hours, such as cleaners, and also during extended hours if applicable.

Evacuation procedures

The production of evacuation procedures is the responsibility of the responsible person, who should consult the NASUWT Representative and the local fire brigade.

Escape routes must lead to an assembly point and alternative routes must be available in the event that a prescribed route cannot be used. The responsible person should take advice from a professional consultant in setting up 'personal emergency evacuation plans' (PEEP) for the evacuation of disabled persons who frequently use a building.

The main object should be to prevent panic and ensure the safe evacuation of all occupants from the building. Clear information and instructions about how to prevent fires and what to do if there is a fire will need to be made available to all staff, pupils, visitors and supply/temporary staff.

Assembly points

The place of assembly must be predetermined within the evacuation procedure. The area needs to be in the open air and a safe distance from the building. It must not be on any route which might be used by the emergency services.

Once at the assembly point, a roll call should be carefully and efficiently arranged in accordance with the school/college procedure. All those on the premises should understand the system. The roll call must include provision for recording visitors, including supply/temporary staff. In the event of persons being missing, information should be immediately passed to the Officer in Charge from the fire brigade.

Calling the fire brigade

The fire brigade should be called for all outbreaks of fire or of suspected fire. The fire safety/evacuation procedure should state who is responsible for summoning the fire brigade.

If a fire breaks out

Employees must co-operate with the responsible person to ensure that the workplace is safe from fire and its effects and must not do anything that will place them or others at risk. The fire safety/evacuation procedure should be adhered to explicitly.

If a fire breaks out, the first priority should be to trigger the alarm system to ensure safe evacuation of the premises. Untrained persons should not try or be expected to extinguish a fire.

It has to be remembered that fire fighting must always be secondary to life safety. Evacuation should be the primary concern. Escape is the priority.

Special considerations concerning the alarm system

Alarm systems should never be switched off. They should be recognisable and distinctive from other audible signals used in the premises. The fire alarm system should include a supplementary manual, fail-safe system of which all staff and pupils have been made aware. All electrical fire warning systems are required to have a backup power supply. It is a criminal offence to interfere with safety equipment.

The fire safety procedure should ensure that where people have hearing difficulties, particularly those who are profoundly deaf, visual beacons, vibrating devices or pagers linked to the existing fire alarm are provided.

Re-entry to a building on fire

Re-entry to search for missing persons should be effected by the fire brigade only. No-one should re-enter to retrieve possessions.

FIRE PREVENTION

Large quantities of combustible materials, which need to be stored appropriately when not in use, can be present in schools and colleges. This is likely to include items such as audiovisual equipment (e.g. televisions, video/DVD players, etc.) and materials used for class demonstrations (e.g. artwork materials, books, scientific equipment, etc.). The responsible person should ensure appropriate storage is available for these materials.