Fire drills

This guidance is updated from material previously included in ‘Fire Safety Instruction and Training’.

1. Introduction

1.1 All Schools and Departments must comply with the University’s arrangements for fire drills, as set out below.

1.2 Regular fire evacuation drills must be held in all buildings where employees are based. The main purposes are

- for as many occupants as possible to experience an actual evacuation
- to familiarise occupants with correct emergency action
- for staff with evacuation roles to practise them
- to test fire arrangements and identify any weaknesses.

1.3 Fire drills are required by legislative guidance, which also indicates that

- for buildings with more than one escape route, one should be unavailable to simulate the conditions of an actual fire (a different route should be chosen each time)
- the “arrangements for disabled people” should be tested.

These features should be included in most fire drills, but may not be essential on every occasion. This will be determined by the SHE Unit and building management.

1.4 The following do not require fire drills:

- non-residential buildings in which no staff work permanently (e.g. Grimond; Oaks Study Hub)
- residences equivalent to small HMOs (Darwin Houses and Park Wood Houses).

2. False fire alarms

Unplanned evacuations, e.g. those caused by unwanted fire alarm signals, do not count as fire drills. This has been confirmed by local Fire & Rescue Service enforcement officers.

3. Frequency and timing

3.1 Fire drills must be held at least annually in each relevant building, but the fire risk assessment or building manager may specify more frequent drills, where necessary or beneficial.

For buildings used by students, at least one fire drill per year should take place in the autumn, preferably early in the term (although Week 1 is not generally recommended).

3.2 When planning the time and date of a drill, a balance must sometimes be struck between minimising disruption to University life and ensuring that the drill takes place during typical conditions and occupancy. In buildings with teaching spaces it is normal to hold drills at lecture changeover times.
4. **Responsibility and planning**

4.1 The prime Responsible Person for each building (usually the Director of Estates, Kent Hospitality or the Head of the sole School occupying – as indicated in the building fire risk assessment) is responsible for ensuring that fire drills are carried out.

4.2 Planning may be delegated to the Departmental Safety Co-ordinator or other appropriate members of staff. When setting the date and time of each drill, they must liaise and agree with

- the SHE Unit – who must observe the drill
- Security or Medway Facilities Management – who must facilitate the evacuation
- Estates Maintenance – who must activate and reset the fire alarm system.

4.3 Staged scenarios (e.g. escape route blockages, assisted evacuations) must be planned in conjunction with the SHE Unit. Expected outcomes, implications for incident command, possible risks, and briefing of volunteers should be considered.

4.4 Campus Security or Medway Facilities Management will determine whether to attend prior to the drill, or to wait for normal incident communications and command before mobilising.

5. **Communications prior to drills, and detailed planning**

5.1 Normally, as few people as possible should be aware of the drill in advance. Managers, lecturers and even Fire Marshals should not be forewarned unless there is a particular, unusual need or benefit.

5.2 If any critical equipment, processes or experiments will be running, it may be appropriate to inform relevant staff of the drill. It may be necessary to consider their evacuation arrangements, e.g. any delay required for shutdown – however, this should already be established by risk assessment. People must never be allowed to remain in the building during the drill without special arrangements planned with the SHE Unit and Security/ Facilities Management – this is because during a drill, the normal means of raising the alarm in the event of a fire are not available.

5.3 Staff involved in staged blockages or assisted evacuations should be briefed on the scenario and the intention. Ideally they should wear hi-vis tabards or carry suitable notices. They should be as informative as possible to other people evacuating, to ensure no confusion or distress is caused. Suggestions are

- “This direction is cut off by the incident – please use the alternative escape route…”
- “Security know I am awaiting assistance, please evacuate as normal…”

5.4 Everyone informed of the drill in advance should be instructed not to tell anyone else.

5.5 Occasionally fire drills of a different nature may be conducted – dry-runs, silent walkthroughs or other simulations. These can be useful in buildings such as libraries or theatres. Relevant staff including Fire Marshals will usually be briefed in advance of these exercises.
6. **Conducting drills**

6.1 It is important that the time set for the drill is adhered to, so that there is no confusion with a real emergency.

6.2 The fire alarm system must always be activated at a manual call point (not at the panel).

6.3 To avoid building occupants anticipating drills, it is usually recommended that observers and Campus Security staff (if already present) in hi-vis tabards etc. should not congregate visibly outside the building prior to the drill.

6.4 The SHE Unit and Security/Facilities Management will observe

- evacuation time
- whether people move away from the building to the assembly point (this may need to be prompted)
- whether people attempt to (re)enter the building
- whether Fire Marshals report their information correctly
- to what extent Fire Marshals’ reports account for the whole building
- results of staged scenarios
- any other events/features or problems

6.5 The evacuation time is measured from the moment the fire alarm system is activated until the last evacuee leaves the building. For small to medium sized buildings, a maximum of three minutes is ideal; for some larger buildings, up to five minutes is satisfactory. Longer evacuation times warrant investigation and improvement, and it may be advisable to plan another drill sooner than usual.

6.6 The identity of all late leavers (after 5 minutes) should be reported to the Masters or relevant Heads of School or Department for disciplinary follow-up.

6.7 As with any evacuation, occupants must not re-enter the building until the all-clear has been given by Security or Medway Facilities Management.

7. **Communications following drills**

7.1 A debrief should be carried out with Fire Marshals and other people with roles in the drill.

7.2 Building occupants should be encouraged to report any problems found during the drill, such as

- unintended blockages
- trip hazards
- bottlenecks along escape routes
- inaudible alarms
- equipment faults
- fastenings difficult to open
- people slow or unwilling to evacuate
7.3 The SHE Unit will compile a report on each drill, including observations, outcomes, concerns and/or recommendations as appropriate. In some buildings, other managers will also issue reports (e.g. Templeman Library, Ingram). Reports are circulated to staff with relevant roles or responsibilities.

7.4 It is strongly recommended that building occupants are informed of the results of the drill. Managers may sometimes choose to circulate the full reports.

8. **Review**

8.1 Results of fire drills will sometimes prompt review of fire risk assessments, plans and procedures. The SHE Unit and/or relevant managers will initiate reviews.