Fire Safety Management and Emergency Evacuation

1. Introduction

Fire is one of the greatest risks faced by the University. It may happen at any time, and the effects can be lethal and devastating. There are numerous examples of fires in Universities causing extreme damage and even total loss of major buildings. Fires can result from spontaneous, unpredictable events but also through carelessness, criminal intent, neglect, or a lack of awareness and vigilance. Fire safety can easily be compromised by poor management.

We must continue to promote a strong fire safety culture throughout the University. Everyone must play their part in preventing fire, obeying fire safety rules and knowing how to respond in an emergency.

We have issued this guidance to help all managers discharge their fire safety duties.

2. Summary of management duties

2.1 Legal responsibility for fire safety, including safe evacuation of all building occupants, rests entirely with management rather than the Fire and Rescue Service. The emphasis is on life safety before property.

2.2 The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 introduced the concept of the “Responsible Person” for premises fire safety. Usually this is the employer, owner or person in control of a building, but the University is more complex. Council and the Vice-Chancellor share some of this responsibility, but are remote from day-to-day management – therefore the prime Responsible Person for each building is generally:

- for buildings occupied by a single School or Department, the Head of School or Department
- for all buildings containing sleeping accommodation, the Director of Kent Hospitality
- for other buildings occupied by multiple schools/departments and/or tenant organisations, the Director of Estates.

Exceptions to the above (for example, Ingram) are noted within relevant fire risk assessments.

Schools and Departments sharing occupancy of buildings must co-operate and co-ordinate their fire arrangements.

Owners/employers in tenant organisations are legally “Responsible Persons” for the area they occupy. For these premises the Director of Estates is also a “Responsible Person”, with regard to the University as landlord.

2.3 Legislation requires that all University premises are fire risk assessed. This includes many events, and temporary structures such as marquees.
Fire Risk Assessments are conducted by the Safety, Health and Environment Unit. The Fire Safety and Environment Adviser and Fire Safety and PEEP Adviser are “Competent Persons” as defined by legislation, and are available for support and advice.

Each Fire Risk Assessment is published in conjunction with a Fire Safety Manual or Fire Emergency Plan (or for very simple buildings, a Fire Information Sheet may suffice). These documents list fire safety features and arrangements, including the means of ensuring safe evacuation of everyone present under all reasonably foreseeable circumstances.

2.4 All managers throughout University premises have responsibilities under fire safety law. They must ensure that fire safety measures are fully implemented within their own areas. This includes

- ensuring staff awareness of fire safety, including fire prevention and emergency action
- ensuring fire risks are controlled
- keeping all escape routes unobstructed and suitably fire sterile
- appointing sufficient Fire Marshals and deputies, and ensuring they are suitably trained
- ensuring basic local fire safety inspections are carried out (usually by Fire Marshals)
- where particular fire risks exist, nominating and training staff to use fire extinguishers
- ensuring that suitable fire drills are planned
- ensuring that all requirements of Fire Risk Assessments are observed, and all published guidance followed
- contacting the Safety, Health and Environment Unit immediately if people with disabilities, impairments or other relevant conditions are to use the premises, and ensuring PEEPs (Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans) are provided where necessary
- informing the Safety, Health and Environment Unit in advance of significant change

2.5 Other inspection, testing and maintenance of fire safety features is usually delegated to Estates, including

- fire alarm systems
- alarm-linked devices, e.g. electromagnetic locks, magnetic holdback devices
- relevant signage
- emergency lighting
- fire fighting equipment
- passive fire protection, e.g. fire doors, fire resisting construction, fire dampers
- other infrastructure, e.g. safe area (previously termed “refuge”) and assistance point communications
- assisted evacuation equipment
Estates are also responsible for carrying out works to buildings and infrastructure to ensure compliance with fire safety legislation, guidance, standards and requirements identified in Fire Risk Assessments.

3. **Building Fire Officer**

3.1 Some buildings have a nominated Building Fire Officer (often the Departmental Safety Co-ordinator) who oversees fire safety for the building.

Typically, the BFO co-ordinates evacuations in conjunction with the Incident Co-Ordinator (Campus Security).

At least one deputy should be appointed to cover absences. People nominated should normally work in the building, and receive suitable training.

3.2 In some buildings it is impracticable or meaningless to nominate BFOs. Line management of all Schools and Departments occupying the building have responsibility of implementing fire safety measures.

4. **Emergency evacuation procedures**

4.1 All staff must be aware of the fire evacuation procedure below, and comply with it at all times. It is common to all University buildings but some details vary slightly in certain locations.

**If you discover a fire**

- keep safe – retreat from fire
- raise the alarm immediately
- evacuate
- do not attempt to tackle the fire unless fully trained
- Campus Security or Facilities Management call the Fire & Rescue Service
- (in a small minority of buildings, it is necessary to telephone Campus Security or the Fire & Rescue Service from a safe place – see Fire Action Notices in relevant buildings, and section on Fire Alarm Systems below)

**When the fire alarm sounds**

- Close windows and doors if safe to do so
- Do not delay or go elsewhere to join other people or collect personal possessions
- Leave quickly but do not panic or rush unduly
- Encourage others to leave, but do not waste time persuading them
- Use the shortest exit route available
Do not use lifts
Report any relevant information to Campus Security
Proceed to the assembly point
Do not return until authorised

4.2 Visiting organisations should be given suitable information, put equivalent arrangements in place and instruct their delegates accordingly.

4.3 Without putting themselves at risk, staff must ensure that students and visitors in their care (e.g. including at lectures or tutorials) evacuate promptly. They should report to Campus Security that the room they are using is fully evacuated. See Fire Safety Responsibilities of Session Leaders guidance document.

4.4 Sufficient trained Fire Marshals should be available to facilitate evacuation, “sweep” their designated area and report information to Campus Security. Wherever practicable, the whole building should be covered. The most suitable people to appoint are those whose duties do not normally take them away from their workplace, such as administration staff. Fire Marshals must receive training – most importantly, they must not put themselves at additional risk and must be able to keep themselves safe when approaching a possible fire.

Main Fire Marshals also have local fire safety inspection tasks, but this may vary from building to building. Guidance to Fire Marshals’ duties is outlined in the document Fire Marshalling.

4.5 Door Wardens may be necessary in some areas. Their role is to stand outside entrances and prevent unauthorised people entering until the emergency is over. Sometimes Fire Marshals fulfil this role after they have completed their evacuation tasks and reported their information.

4.6 In some buildings, staff may be needed to assist with evacuation of people with disabilities, impairments and other conditions which affect their ability to escape safely. This may be generic (e.g. trained operators of evacuation equipment, to supplement Campus Security or Facilities Management) or specific to Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans (e.g. someone briefed to act as a “buddy”).

4.7 Trained deputies should be available for the evacuation roles above (4.4 to 4.6) to cover absences.

4.8 Note that a trained “First Responder” (Campus Security Officer) attends the exact location of the fire or false alarm almost immediately. As well as assessing the incident and taking action to extinguish or limit the fire, they will direct or assist anyone still present and sweep the immediate area.

4.9 Identification of personnel: Fire Marshals, Door Wardens, staff assisting people with disabilities, etc. should wear a hi-vis tabard or similar distinguishing garment. This lends authority when instructing people to leave, and allows Campus Security to identify staff with evacuation roles more easily. Security Officers wear yellow hi-vis
tabards and the Incident Co-ordinator (generally the Campus Security Supervisor) normally wears a red hi-vis tabard. These garments are available at minimal cost and the Safety Health and Environment Unit can give details of suppliers.

4.10 The University’s SafeZone app is extremely useful for emergencies, but must only be used as a backup (not primary) form of communication in a fire evacuation.

5. **Confirming full evacuation**

5.1 Roll calls at fire assembly points tend to be unreliable, and are not recommended. Even in very simple buildings, there may be unaccounted absences (e.g. someone at lunch or visiting another building) or additional personnel present (e.g. contractors).

5.2 Fire Marshals should report to the Incident Co-ordinator (Campus Security), or the Chief Fire Marshal where one is provided, indicating the area they have swept and whether it is clear.

5.3 Staff leading seminars, lectures or other sessions/events should report their area clear to the Incident Co-ordinator (Campus Security) (see 4.3 above).

5.4 From these reports and information from their First Responder, Campus Security confirm the evacuation status of the whole building, or as much of it as possible.

6. **Means of escape**

6.1 There is no longer a distinction between designated or protected escape routes and other thoroughfares – all circulation routes are regarded as escape routes.

6.2 All escape routes, fire exits and “places of relative safety”, including safe areas (previously termed “refuges”) and assistance points, must be freely passable and kept clear of obstructions at all times. Furniture and other items must not reduce escape gangways – full width (as per both leaves of cross-corridor fire doors, final exits etc.) must be maintained throughout, unless fire risk assessment has determined otherwise.

6.3 Escape routes should be reasonably straight, so that people with mobility or visual impairments do not encounter unnecessary changes of direction. All doors along escape routes must be unlocked at all times when the building is occupied, and immediately openable with a single action (or locked only by means of an electromagnetic device linked to the fire alarm system).

6.4 Escape routes must also be kept suitably fire-sterile, i.e. contain nil or limited fire risks. This varies in different locations. Most dead-end corridors and escape staircases must be kept strictly fire sterile, but e.g. many corridors and atria only relatively. See also section 9 below.

6.5 Staff must always consult the SHE Unit before placing or using any of the following in circulation or escape routes:
• electrical equipment
• combustible materials such as open noticeboards, display or essay racks, recycling bins, artwork
• furniture
• any items that could be easily knocked over so as to obstruct the means of escape

6.6 Noticeboards and displays are acceptable if enclosed in fire resisting enclosures, i.e. behind glass or polycarbonate.

Where open noticeboards and other combustible items are tolerable in corridors etc. (as fire risk assessed – e.g. normally where there are two directions of escape) they must

• occupy a minority of the wall space available
• be well separated one from the next to prevent continuous flame spread
• be well managed – postings fixed down at all four corners, and prevented from accumulating
• be replaced with enclosed types wherever practicable, when the area is next refurbished.

6.7 Depending on the escape route location, at the discretion of the SHE Unit, lockers and storage cupboards may be limited to metal types which must be kept locked at all times. Typically they must have sloping tops to prevent any items being placed on them.

6.8 Fire doors prevent or delay the spread of smoke and fire. They are critically important for safe evacuation – especially for Fire Marshals, First Responders and people with impairments or other conditions who may evacuate more slowly, or be awaiting assistance. Fire doors have blue signs indicating their mandatory condition. Some have automated holdbacks which release when the fire alarm sounds – these must not be obstructed. All other fire doors must remain strictly closed at all times, and must never be wedged, tied or propped open. Any fire door which fails to self-close fully should be reported immediately to the Estates Helpdesk.

6.9 Escape route signage includes green directional signs showing the nearest exit route (from a given position, an alternative route is usually signed only after the next change of direction).

6.10 Fire Action Notices are provided in prominent locations, summarising the evacuation procedure and identifying the assembly point.

6.11 Where people need assistance to escape safely (due to impairments or other relevant conditions) Campus Security or Medway Facilities Management provide generic arrangements. In some buildings these are supplemented by local staff, as per 4.6 above (e.g. Templeman Library; Sail & Colour Loft) and/or, for regular building users, as specified in Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans.
7. **Fire Alarm Systems**

7.1 All buildings on campus have a fire alarm system (except as per 7.4 below). Manual call points and automatic fire detection are provided. The alarm sound is either a siren or bell, and flashing beacons are fitted in some locations.

7.2 Fire alarm systems are tested weekly between 0800 and 1000 hrs. All staff should be familiar with the day and time of the test in their building. Typically the alarm is sounded twice for up to 40 seconds. If the alarm sounds for more than 60 seconds at this time, everyone must evacuate.

7.3 The fire alarm system in most buildings is connected to the Campus Security control room. In buildings not connected (as indicated on Fire Action Notices) Campus Security must be telephoned immediately (01227 82)3333 in the event of fire.

7.4 In a few extremely small buildings where there is no fire alarm system, the alarm is raised simply by shouting. Campus Security must be telephoned immediately (01227 82)3333.

8. **Fire-fighting equipment**

8.1 All building locations are provided with appropriate fire extinguishers and/or fire blankets. They must be kept unobstructed, intact and available for immediate use at all times.

8.2 Nobody should attempt to fight a fire unless they have received full hands-on training in extinguisher use within the last 3 years. This is because fighting fires can be extremely dangerous, especially if the wrong extinguisher is used, and if carried out incorrectly can spread fire rather than extinguish it.

   Campus Security, Medway Facilities Management staff, and some staff in areas with particular fire risks are trained in fire extinguisher use. Such areas of risk include

   - laboratories
   - commercial kitchens
   - theatres
   - some workshops
   - locations where maintenance is carried out.

   For everyone else, extinguishers should only be used for life safety purposes, if it is necessary to prevent or limit injury. Such instances are extremely rare.

8.3 Estates provide annual servicing of all extinguishers. They should also be inspected weekly and the results recorded monthly – this is typically carried out by Fire Marshals or Facilities Management staff. The weekly inspections confirm that extinguishers
are in the correct location, fitted to a wall or on a stand
are intact and functional (pin fitted, seal unbroken)
are not overdue for maintenance.

8.4 Extinguishers must be reported to the Estates Helpdesk immediately if they have been discharged, or if the plastic seal (tamper-evident tag) is broken. Where these problems are recurrent, preventative measures should be taken – contact the SHE Unit for advice.

8.5 Significant changes to areas can affect fire extinguisher provision, for example

- change of use
- change of layout
- introduction of new equipment

The SHE Unit should always be informed in advance.

9. Fire prevention

9.1 Nearly all fires can be prevented easily. Good housekeeping, awareness and sensible precautions will minimise the likelihood of fire occurring.

Common causes of fire include faulty or misused electrical equipment, arson, cooking, heating and smoking. Most fires develop only because of carelessness – e.g. combustibles left close to sources of heat or possible ignition, accumulations of combustible waste, cigarettes not fully extinguished and dropped into litter bins.

Everyone should be encouraged to report hazards to their colleagues, line manager, Departmental Safety Co-ordinator, the Estates Helpdesk or the SHE Unit as appropriate.

9.2 Electrical equipment

9.2.1 Complying with the University's policy and guidance on electrical equipment (qv) will minimise the risk of fire.

9.2.2 Combustible materials such as paper, cardboard and textiles should be kept at least 500mm from electrical equipment including lighting, photocopiers and printers.

9.3 Combustible materials

9.3.1 Fire loadings (overall amounts of combustible materials) should be kept to a reasonable minimum in all rooms. Books, files, paper, cartons etc. must not be allowed to accumulate to excessive levels.
9.3.2 Flammable liquids must be kept in approved fire resisting cabinets, except for single, small aerosol cans of everyday cleaning materials or stationery (e.g. furniture polish or spray fixative).

9.3.3 Stores should be kept locked at all times; this is mandatory in circulation and escape route locations.

9.3.4 All furniture should be to modern standards of fire performance, with upholstery in good unworn condition. This is especially critical in escape routes.

9.3.5 All waste should be removed promptly. Never leave waste in escape staircases, lobbies etc. (see also “Means of Escape” above).

9.3.6 Unless specifically fire risk assessed as tolerable, open skips, piles of pallets, combustible structures and similar materials in outside areas must be at least 8 metres from any building.

9.4 Smoking

Smoking is prohibited in all buildings, and in most areas within 5m of buildings. Care should be taken to ensure smoking materials are fully extinguished, and to dispose of them appropriately.

9.5 Arson

Everyone should be encouraged to report suspicious behaviour. All such reports should be brought to the attention of Campus Security.

Following the general preventative measures outlined above will minimise arson risks.

9.6 Other

Less commonplace fire risks are not fully covered by this guidance. Fire risk assessments of buildings or events will either cover these risks or specify what further action is to be taken. Examples are

- “Dangerous” materials (flammable, explosive etc.) requiring specific risk assessment under DSEAR Regulations
- Small-scale “hot work”, e.g. minor plumbing tasks and soldering (see Use of Soldering Irons guidance document)
- Outdoor fires such as bonfires or barbecues (see Outdoor Fires guidance document)
10. **Contractors**

10.1 Contractors must be informed of all relevant requirements including fire procedures, and follow them. For example, they must not

- introduce additional fire risks, unless suitably controlled
- obstruct escape routes
- hold fire doors open
- cover fire detectors unless authorised by Estates.

10.2 Building works must always be planned and supervised by, or in consultation with, Estates. They may require specific Fire Risk Assessments for the duration of the work, depending on its nature and extent.

10.3 Building works may require parts of the fire alarm system to be disabled, in particular detectors, to avoid unwanted fire alarm signals. Isolations should preferably be electronic (i.e. at the fire alarm panel) but in some cases it will be necessary to cover detectors. It is vital that all covers are removed immediately on completion of the work.

10.4 "Hot work" such as welding, grinding/cutting or use of a blow lamp must be covered by a formal Permit To Work administered by Estates. The arrangements will include constant fire-watching during and for a defined period after the work. Checks should also be made at the end of each working day to ensure that no materials are smouldering.

10.5 Where works temporarily require dangerous substances such as flammable liquids or gases, full information including safety data sheets should be readily available for Campus Security and the Fire and Rescue Service.

11. **Other emergency procedures**

Bomb threats and other building emergencies are detailed in other documents. Detailed plans, giving the action required should a bomb or similar threat be received, have been drawn up for specific groups of staff and students. Responsibility for these procedures lies with the Estates Department.

School or Departmental management and Fire Marshals may be requested to assist with non-fire evacuations, as determined by Campus Security or senior response teams.

ACB 2016