

Fire safety and evacuation procedures

Revised Safety Guides 5 and 6 on the management of fire drills and evacuation procedures have been published on the H&SS web site. The revised guides have new information on the use of refuges for the evacuation of people with disabilities; management of classes or meetings in centrally-booked rooms; and response to other emergencies such as suspect packages.

New fire legislation, which emphasises the duties of the employer to manage emergency evacuations, has prompted this review. The most significant are enhancements to:

- Require the appointment of a Fire Safety Co-ordinator in each building i.e. a lead person to coordinate and monitor fire safety arrangements. This is particularly important in shared buildings.
- Explain how our existing refuges for people with disabilities are intended to be used.
- Encourage the use of Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans (PEEPs) for staff and students with a disability, and for anyone who needs assistance or special consideration when evacuations take place.
- Ask anyone who takes classes or is in charge of meetings in centrally booked rooms to make the evacuation arrangements for the building known to those attending (for classes that use the same lecture room for a term or a year, this need only happen at the start of the term/year). Information for each room is already posted within rooms.

- Ask anyone who takes classes/meetings in centrally booked rooms to make sure everyone evacuates the room, and then report that the room is clear to the Evacuation Officer at the assembly point.
- Ensure that every building has arrangements in place to check the building is clear, if practical and safe to do so. As a minimum each building must have a system by which it is known which areas have and have not been checked.

What this means

For the many buildings with well developed evacuation procedures and trained staff, there is very little change. Other buildings, especially those with shared occupancy, may need to review their procedures and make some adjustments. Procedures should be based on a fire risk assessment. Health and Safety Services will be happy to help you with this.

Where staff in academic buildings are aware of the regular presence of a person with a disability in the building, Health and Safety Services will help with the development of a PEEP. The Disability Office will make new students aware of PEEPs and encourage them to liaise with staff

in the building to agree a PEEP for the buildings where they live, study or work in regularly.

January storm

The storm on 18 January 2007 caused considerable damage to buildings and trees on campus, with gusts of over 70m.p.h. recorded in Berkshire. On the day Facilities Management Directorate staff worked very hard to make areas safe and to prevent access to locations where there was obvious danger.

Despite this, people on campus continued to walk past and under hazard warning tape, thus placing themselves in danger.

Everyone on campus is reminded that hazard signs, hazard warning tape, cones etc are used to inform you of a risk to your health and safety and to prevent you from going into possible danger. Other examples of times when areas may be barriered or marked off include chemical spills (e.g. mercury), construction works and large vehicle movements.

It is essential for your own safety that you obey safety signs and do not enter demarcated areas.

Health and Safety Services
Facilities Management Directorate

Extension 8888

Web: www.fmd.rdg.ac.uk/safety/

Email: safety@rdg.ac.uk

Contact: Moira Simpson, Head of Health and Safety Services

Asbestos – are you aware?

In November 2006, new asbestos legislation came into force so it's timely to look at asbestos issues around the University. It is important that staff know what to do, and what not to do, to avoid disturbing asbestos containing materials.

Floor tiles containing asbestos (courtesy of HSE)



Many of the University's buildings were built or refurbished at a time when the use of asbestos containing materials (ACMs) was common. As a result, a significant number of our buildings have been found to contain asbestos containing materials. These materials only represent a health hazard if they become damaged and fibres are released into the atmosphere and inhaled. If the materials are sealed, by paint for example, they cannot be inhaled.

The University has recently carried out a programme of re-inspections of known asbestos containing materials to update the records and schedule repairs.

Many University building occupants wish to carry out minor alterations in the buildings that they occupy. Lifting ceiling tiles, preparing a surface for painting or changing a door lock could expose hidden asbestos containing materials. Any activity that involves drilling, cutting, sanding or disturbing materials made from asbestos and then breathing in the dust must be avoided.

You MUST therefore check that any minor alterations you intend to carry out won't damage any asbestos containing materials. You can do this by completing an 'Authorisation

to Work' Form and sending this to FMD. The form is on the University web at www.fmd.rdg.ac.uk/bsd/docs/Authorisation%20to%20Work.pdf

Other risks

It's not just asbestos that can be damaged by something as seemingly straightforward as putting up a shelf or pinboard. For example there may be electrical cabling embedded in the wall, or the wall itself may not be robust enough to take the weight of a shelf and books.

When your 'Authorisation to Work' form is received, staff at FMD will check out all the relevant issues and let you know if it's ok to proceed or whether further investigations are required.

If you would like further information on asbestos in University buildings, all data on known asbestos is held by FMD on the Wren database. University staff with a password can access this via the Wren Web. If you do not have a password please call the FMD Helpdesk x7000.

Finally, if you notice any damage to suspected asbestos materials then please let the Helpdesk know.

Needlestick and sharps injuries

This reminder about good practice when using hypodermic needles is prompted by a recent observation of "unsafe practices" in a University laboratory.

When hypodermic needles are used in the laboratory, e.g. for taking blood from human or animal subjects, the greatest risk of needlestick injury occurs if the needle is re-sheathed or is discarded inappropriately without being re-sheathed. If you re-sheath a needle after taking a blood sample, you are at risk from accidentally injecting yourself. If an unsheathed needle is

discarded into an ordinary waste bin or into a biohazard bag, the person handling the waste is placed at risk.

The risk to health arises because used needles may be contaminated by hazardous agents – in the worst-case scenario, they could be contaminated by blood-borne viruses such as Hepatitis B and C or Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV – the causative agent of AIDS.) Even needles not used with human blood may be contaminated with other biological agents or hazardous chemicals. Similar injection risks may arise from "sharps" injuries caused by scalpel blades and contaminated broken glass or equipment.

So here are a few simple rules for laboratory use of hypodermic needles:

- Make sure you have a suitable autoclavable Sharps bin immediately to hand before you start.
- Perform the necessary operation quickly, but do not rush, and keep your mind on the job.
- After using the needle, discard it directly into the Sharps container, making sure that the flap closes after putting the needle in the bin. If possible, discard the syringe without attempting to demount the needle.
- NEVER attempt to re-sheath the needle.
- NEVER walk around the lab with an unsheathed needle, whether mounted on a syringe or not – this increases the risk of an injury either to yourself (for example, if you trip over or knock against something) or to someone else you may collide with.
- When the Sharps bin is full, it must be autoclaved, then sent for incineration as "hazardous waste".

Hypodermic needles may also be found on the campus at large – in the grounds, toilets, waste bins around the campus, etc. These are likely to have been discarded inappropriately or maliciously by

injecting drug users. Although it is not believed that this is a significant problem on campus, staff who deal with the cleaning and maintenance of campus facilities need to be aware of the possibility of finding discarded needles. Health and Safety Services can help managers to develop local procedures for dealing with discarded needles.

All accidental needlestick or other sharps injuries must be reported to Health and Safety Services on an Incident Report Form. Depending on the circumstances, you may be advised to visit Occupational Health for further advice, and you may be offered prophylaxis (where this is available.)

This information will be incorporated into a Safety Note to be published in the near future.

Smoking on campus

New legislation comes into force on 1 July 2007, which will ban smoking in virtually all workplaces. This will reinforce the University's existing 'smoke-free' policy in its academic and support buildings.

However the University's existing policy may need to be extended to areas that are "substantially enclosed". The regulations define what is meant by "substantially enclosed" - in practice this is likely to include building porches and canopies that have a roof and walls. Further guidance will be given when the draft Regulations are approved by Parliament.

All University vehicles used by more than one person will have to be designated 'smoke-free'. Buildings and vehicles will need to have appropriate signage - supplies of 'approved' signs will be available after Easter from the Department of Health. Health and Safety Services will take the lead in obtaining supplies for distribution round campus.

There are penalties (fines) for individuals and employers who fail to comply with the legislation. This includes fines for:

- failing to stop a person smoking in a smoke free area (applies to the person who controls or manages the premises);
- smoking in a smoke-free area of vehicle (applies to the individual)
- failing to have the correct signage on display.

If anyone is involved with a drama production on university premises that may involve smoking on stage, please contact Health and Safety Services for further advice. While there may be a legal exemption that might permit smoking in these circumstances, this needs to be clarified when the legislation is finalised.

The question of smoking in Halls of Residence is more complex. A policy will need to be agreed with the Residential Management Committee, which will be announced before 1 July 2007.

Through its Occupational Health service, the University provides support for any member of staff who wishes to give up smoking. Occupational Health's contact details are available on the H&SS web site home page.

Mobile phones and driving

Legislation about the use of mobile phones while driving has CHANGED! You are now liable for a fine and 3 points on your licence if you drive while using a hand-held phone.

You should already know that it is an offence to use a hand-held phone, or similar device, when driving. From 27th February 2007, the penalty is now a £60 "fixed penalty" fine or up to £1,000 on conviction in court (£2,500 for drivers of goods vehicles, buses or coaches) plus 3 penalty points on your licence.

"Hands-free phone" equipment remains legal, but is **discouraged** because these devices are distracting and you still risk prosecution for failure to have proper control of the vehicle if you use a hands-free phone when driving.

If your mobile phone rings when you are driving you should let it ring and return the call when safely parked. Even better. switch your phone to voicemail before starting your journey. 'Safely parked' does NOT include the hard shoulder on a motorway!

Employers can be held liable under the new legislation if they require employees to use a hand-held phone while driving. The University, therefore, does not permit the use of hand-held phones while driving on University business. Facilities Management Directorate have gone one step further and have a policy that prohibits the use of hands-free phones while driving.

Clean and Green @ Reading

The University's new Waste Management Services contract started on 1st January 2007. The contractor, Select Environmental Services, a local company based in Reading, has introduced new colour-coded bins in support of the University's objective of increasing our recycling of waste materials.

The main difference you will have noticed around campus is the removal of the large 10 cubic yard blue and green bins. They have nearly all been replaced by smaller 1100 litre Eurocarts.



These are differentiated by colour:
Blue for paper and cardboard.

Clean paper and card, i.e. free of plastic, non-laminated or coated – goes into the **blue bin**.

Green for mixed recyclables

Recyclable empty plastic drinks bottles, drinks cans, plastic wrapping (no food containers) and mixed cardboard and paper go into the **green bin**. If the waste is bagged, it must be in clear sacks. Black waste sacks must not be put in the blue or green bins. There is a bottle bank for glass near Central Catering.

Grey/black for waste that cannot be recycled.

Everything else that is not classed as “hazardous waste” goes into the **grey/black bin**. This waste is landfilled and attracts a heavy tax burden. Not sure whether the item is recyclable or not? Put it in the grey/black bin - contamination of recyclable waste could mean a whole load being rejected by the reprocessors and being sent to landfill. This is worse than putting something recyclable in the grey/black general waste. Not sure whether the waste is classified as “hazardous”? Consult the “Waste” pages on the FMD website, <http://www.fmd.rdg.ac.uk/waste/>

The new scheme is settling down and thanks are due to everyone for their efforts in making it work. Ian Cruickshank, from Campus Services, is overseeing the new contract. Any comments or suggestions for improvement should be sent to him (Tel. 6927, e:mail ij.t.cruickshank@reading.ac.uk)

Gas cylinder safety

During a recent building visit we discovered an oxygen cylinder in an external gas store, with a regulator fitted. The regulator was marked “ARGON”, and was indicating a nearly full cylinder – i.e. cylinder pressure was being applied to the main inlet gauge on the regulator because cylinder valve had been



left open. This raises a number of concerns.

Firstly, if the outlet valve had been knocked or damaged, oxygen could have leaked out of the system into the store – a highly dangerous situation.

Secondly, only regulators marked “Oxygen” may be used with oxygen cylinders. The ‘wrong’ type of regulator might be contaminated with oil or grease or it might be designed using incompatible materials, causing a fire or explosion hazard.

And finally, when a cylinder is returned to a store, **the main cylinder valve must be closed, and the regulator removed**, whether the cylinder is full, part-used or empty. If returned in a part-full state, the cylinder should be marked to indicate this. Empty cylinders awaiting collection should be kept in a clearly marked, separate area of the store if not in a separate store. Flammable gases such as hydrogen should be separated by at least 3 metres or (preferably) be kept in a separate store from oxidising gases such as oxygen.

When a cylinder is in use, the set-up must comply with the requirements of the Pressure Systems Safety Regulations 2000. As a minimum, this requires that the system is subject to regular inspections according “*to a written scheme of periodic examination, by a competent person*”. (The scheme must specify the nature and frequency of the examinations.) **All users must be aware of the inspection regime for a given system, and ensure that the system is “within date” before use.**

For systems involving portable gas cylinders fitted with low-pressure

outlet tubing from a regulator, the main requirement for the examination scheme relates to the regulator fitted to the cylinder: The regulator must be the correct type for the gas in the cylinder; must be less than 10 years old, and be suitable (in terms of maximum rated pressure for the regulator and the pressure within the cylinder). The regulator must be free of visible damage, and (if more than 5 years old) must have been properly serviced by the manufacturer or a competent person.

Users must also be aware of the manual handling issues relating to gas cylinders – they are heavy, and must be properly transported on purpose-designed cylinder trolleys. If moved to a laboratory, they must be properly restrained, and used in the upright position.

Pressure systems

If you are responsible for, or use, pressure systems, you must make sure that there is a written scheme of examination and an inspection regime.

Contact Health and Safety Services for further advice what you need to do.

Keith Oxley

Finally, we are sorry to say that Keith Oxley, our Fire Safety Adviser, is retiring. We are pleased that he is recovering from recent illness, but he will not be returning to work. We will miss his dry humour, his attempts to set the campus alight with his fire safety demonstrations, and his willingness to provide advice and support to colleagues.

A leaving card is being circulated and Keith will visit us in late March (probably Friday 30th) to say ‘goodbye’. Please contact the Health & Safety Services office if you would like to add your name to the leaving card. You can also send us a short note to be included in the card.