

## Learning from H&S audits

In the last 18 months, Health and Safety Services have implemented a programme of health and safety audits of Schools/Directorates/Units. A number of common themes have emerged, from which all areas of the University can learn.

Learning from experience is valuable – preferably when it’s someone else’s experience and it hasn’t involved you in any pain! Audits are used to check that policies and procedures are being implemented effectively and are having the desired result (in this case, reducing health and safety risks to staff and students). They are also used to share good practice.

The University is trialling an audit system (HASMAM) designed by the Universities Health and Safety Association (USHA) and endorsed by the Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA). HASMAP assesses performance against 12 indicators and 4 performance levels, with Level 1 being a basic performance that falls below legislative requirements, and 4 being best practice.

In the last 18 months we have audited 10 Schools and two Directorates. In total this represents at least 50% of University staff, and covers the majority of common risks.

### Good practice

We like to give credit where it is due, so the following are examples of good practice that could be adopted elsewhere in the University:

- Job descriptions with specific H&S responsibilities written in (Projects team in FMD).
- Appointment of a School Director for H&S (Human and Environmental Sciences).

- Joint workplace inspections (Plant Sciences and the Biocentre).
- Adoption of Quality Assurance in Research protocols which have resulted in standard operating procedures incorporating H&S (Food Biosciences).
- Use of regular staff team meetings to communicate on H&S issues (Pharmacy, CALS).
- Replacement of old equipment to reduce exposure to noise and hand arm vibration (FMD Grounds)
- Building fire evacuation procedures adapted well to suit the building (Psychology).
- Staff trained on-the-job and formally assessed for competency before being allowed to work unsupervised (Biocentre).

### Scope for improvement

Notwithstanding the above, we have found room for improvement in every audit, for example:

- A reactive approach to H&S problems – dealing with issues as they arise, rather than reviewing arrangements to find out what is, and is not, working.
- Lack of local induction procedures for new starters.
- Inadequate training records – without a written record of training delivered/received, it’s very difficult to plan refresher training or prove competence to auditors.

- Risk assessments that are incomplete, too generic, not implemented or not reviewed.
- Out-of-date Area H&S Codes that do not provide essential local H&S information to new staff and students about who’s who; emergency procedures, risks specific to the department etc.
- Portable Appliance Testing out of date.
- Basic fire safety awareness patchy, with few staff having attended formal fire awareness training.
- DSE assessments not completed.
- Lack of formal workplace inspections - although informal inspections take place, these are not recorded and hence there is no ‘audit trail’.
- An *ad hoc* approach to ensuring competence. Especially in higher risk areas, training should be delivered against a specified programme so that competence can be assured.

On the basis of the HASMAP audits performed so far, most departments are achieving scores in the range 1 to 2, with some 3s. Acting on the feedback above will help many Schools/ Directorates achieve higher scores, and more importantly, better management of their H&S risks.

Health and Safety Services  
Facilities Management Directorate

Extension 8888

Web: [www.fmd.reading.ac.uk/](http://www.fmd.reading.ac.uk/)

Email: [safety@reading.ac.uk](mailto:safety@reading.ac.uk)

Contact: Moira Simpson, Head of  
Health and Safety Services

# Building fire safety improvements

**In 2007 the University embarked upon an ambitious programme of fire safety upgrades of some of our older buildings. The aim of the programme is to ensure that the risk from fire to people in these buildings is reduced to what can be considered a 'tolerable' level.**

Many of our buildings are between 20 and 40 years old, and may not have benefited from significant refurbishment during their lifetime. This means that fire safety systems such as alarms and fire doors may not meet modern standards, or are now due for replacement. Therefore the University is investing £17M over the next 5 years to improve fire safety systems.

The fire safety upgrade building works aim to ensure that persons can safely evacuate the building. Typically this will include automatic fire detection, escape lighting and structural protection of escape routes (corridors and staircases). Where appropriate, work may be carried out to improve refuges for disabled people.

The programme has seen the Chaplaincy in Park House Lodge completed in March this year, and Food Biosciences is nearing completion. Work is underway in the Allen Laboratory and Microbiology; with the URS Building and Chemistry due to start later in the year. Buildings currently at feasibility design stage (with an expected start date of April 2009) include the Students Union, Park House, Geosciences and Plant Science. Also at the feasibility design stage are Physics, Maths, Library, Health Centre, Whiteknights House, Soil Science, Systems Engineering and Geography. A design team has been recently assembled to deliver a full fire safety upgrade for the HUMMS building. A strategic review prior to progression to feasibility stage has been carried on the Great Hall at London Road, Blandford Lodge, Whiteknights Boiler House, Engineering, the Muslim Centre, Estates Services and, last but not least, the Telephone Exchange.

The project team will involve building representatives in discussions about

what is required, taking into account present and predicted future use of the building. This risk-based approach will influence the design options. It will also mean that any future changes of use must be notified to FMD so that the fire strategy for the building can be reviewed.

Work will be timed to minimise disruption to building occupants. The extent of the works will vary between buildings, but consultants will need access to all parts of the building, Contractors will be running cabling, installing detectors and in some cases installing fire doors. Once completed, the University Fire Safety Adviser will initiate a fire safety refresher training course for building occupants, and in particular for Evacuation Officers and Fire Wardens.

## Bikes and bouncy castles

**When we review accident reports, we look for any trends from which lessons can be learnt. Last month bouncy castles and bikes featured, and between them resulted in four serious injuries.**



In two separate incidents, students needed hospital treatment after playing on bouncy castles. So if you are organising an event and think that a bouncy castle will add to the fun, remember that there are some safety 'rules' to follow. The most common cause of an accident is down to somersaulting, rough play or wrestling, so there should be someone to supervise and prevent people getting carried away. The installation should also be inspected daily to make sure all anchor points are securely in place.

### The British Inflatable Hirers

Association has useful information on its web site.

Again in separate incidents, two cyclists required hospital treatment after coming off their bikes. One skidded on loose gravel, the other was in collision with a car. Everyone on campus has a responsibility to look out for themselves and other road users – ride carefully and responsibly, watch out for cyclists on roads and paths.

## Guidance on legionella

**New guidance on the control of legionella bacteria in water systems has been published. While most of this refers to FMD procedures, there is a short Safety Note on School/ Department procedures.**

Legionnaires' disease is a potentially fatal form of pneumonia which can affect anybody, but which principally affects those who are susceptible because of age, illness, smoking immunosuppression, etc. It is caused by the bacterium *Legionella pneumophillt* It is normally contracted by inhaling legionella bacteria, either in tiny droplets of water or in droplet nuclei (particles left after the water has evaporated). The incubation period is 2-10 days.

The presence of legionella bacteria in water does not itself constitute a danger. However inhalation of infected water in the form of an aerosol may lead to exposure followed by infection. An aerosol may be caused by spraying, showering, running taps etc. The new procedures give guidance on minimising bacterial colonisation and preventing the formation of aerosols. The highest risk arises where water is stored or recirculated in the temperature range 20° – 45°C. Safety Note 43 identifies the types of departmental equipment that might be susceptible, such as lab water baths, incubators and water purification equipment. Schools/ Departments should access the Safety Note on the web site and make sure that suitable cleaning and maintenance regimes are incorporated into local procedures.