

Fire safety

In the last 12 months, there have been seven fires in academic buildings. Fortunately, no-one has been seriously hurt and damage has been minor. However, these incidents have reinforced the message that fires can, and will, happen, unless everyone is doing their bit for fire prevention.



Here's a summary of recent events:

- Combined chemical/flammable liquid fire initiated by sodium hydride coming into contact with moisture. A student suffered minor burns. The building was out of use for three hours.
- A rotary pump on scanning electron microscope caught fire, due to an electrical fault.
- Sodium hydride fire in a tenanted laboratory. One staff member suffered minor burns.
- Student in a practical class opened the gas tap instead of closing it. This released gas into the lab, which was ignited by an adjacent bunsen burner.
- Student was flaming dry glassware in a fume cupboard but forgot about the presence of a dry ice acetone bath in the same fume cupboard. This ignited.
- Two incidents involving bunsen burners, one of which was left unattended and caused a fire, the other where the rubber supply hose caught fire. On this latter occasion, the fire was extinguished, but the gas supply was not turned off or isolated, leading to gas being released into the laboratory.

All the affected buildings were evacuated safely. However, most of these fires were preventable.

The more fires we have, the more chance there is of people being put in danger, or losing a building. Here's how you can do your bit:

- In laboratories, make sure you understand the properties of the materials you are working with. Develop safe working methods and emergency procedures and check that all staff/students understand them.
- In labs, only have flammable liquids on the bench if you are using them at the time. When not being used, lock them away in a flammables cabinet.
- Find out where the gas isolation valve is for your lab.
- Don't leave naked flames such as bunsens unattended. Check all fittings are secure, and hoses are routed safely.
- Maintain a high standard of housekeeping in all workplaces; reduce the amounts of combustible material as far as possible.

If you do find yourself facing a fire:

- Know how to raise the alarm (shout, use a red break glass call point). **DO THIS FIRST.**
- Instruct a colleague to phone 999, followed by Security on x6300 (x2000 at Greenlands).
- **ONLY** fight the fire if you know which extinguisher to use; how to use it (or sand, or fire blanket); and the fire is small enough to be put out with a single extinguisher. If that's unsuccessful, **EVACUATE.**
- Close the door, go to the assembly point, and tell the Evacuation Officer what you know about the incident.
- Stay out of the building until the all clear is given by the Evacuation Officer, or the Fire Service.

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Overseas travel and fieldwork

Icelandic ash cloud, Japanese earthquake, armed holdup, broken ankle, students 'missing' ... These are a few of the events that have befallen University of Reading travellers in the last couple of years. So a new Safety Guide 38 - Overseas Travel draws on the advice previously given in SG32 Fieldwork, plus national guidance from the Universities Safety and Health Association, and the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). SG 32 Fieldwork now concentrates on the management aspects of undertaking fieldwork for groups of students and staff.

Work undertaken by its staff and students overseas is an essential element of University life. It follows that some colleagues and students may wish to travel to countries where there may be significant risks to personal safety. The University has a duty to ensure that a) the benefits of the work justify any risk, and that b) everything possible is done to reduce the risks and provide support to travellers.

Therefore, all travel to countries where the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) advise against all travel, or essential travel only, must be approved in advance by the Vice-Chancellor, or in his absence, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor or a Pro-Vice-Chancellor.

Proposals must be submitted in good time, with an explanation of the proposed work, how it will benefit the University and an outline of the arrangements to keep the traveller safe. The University Insurance Office must also be contacted to check insurance arrangements and to obtain specialist travel advice.

Most travel is uneventful, but occasionally emergencies arise and the traveller needs help. In most cases the University travel insurers, Zurich, will be the first point of contact. **All overseas travellers should have a note of the Zurich emergency number:**

Zurich Travel Assistance +44 1489 868 888

This will give access to assistance via Zurich's partners Red 24, for security, and medical help via CEGA.

The University contracted travel providers are also able to help – provided you have used them to book your travel! If an event occurs (e.g. natural disaster, terrorism, uprising, banditry etc) and the location is deemed to be too dangerous, the contracted suppliers will notify all registered travellers of what is happening. The travel agent will try to contact any university travellers in-country to help them get them home or relocated. Individuals planning to travel will also be contacted to make alternative arrangements.

Using the FCO LOCATE service will enable the British Embassy to contact you in an emergency. You will also receive FCO briefings via text on the current situation in-country.

However, there may be a few occasions when the University needs to contact the traveller directly to check

that they are safe, or when the traveller needs support that Zurich or the travel suppliers cannot provide. Therefore Schools/ Directorates must have procedures to ensure that they know where their travellers are and can contact them in an emergency. All overseas travel must also be notified to the Insurance Office. Travellers should be able to contact both the University Security emergency number +44 118 378 6300 and a responsible person in their School/ Directorate, even out-of-hours.

The University does not wish to put barriers in the way of travellers or create unnecessary bureaucracy. For straightforward travel to low risk (generally westernised) countries, following the FCO advice and having a system for two way emergency communications is generally sufficient. The University will be working to streamline admin procedures to make these processes as easy as possible for travellers, without multiple form filling.

Work related stress

Health and Safety Services are working in a joint initiative with Human Resources (HR) to carry out stress management training for all managers. The training is being run on a bespoke basis for individual Schools and Directorates, with the objective of preventing, so far as possible, staff becoming ill from work related stress.

The Senior Management Board has identified that the prevention and management of work related stress is an important issue within the University. However, the factors causing stress may be subtly different in each Directorate, Faculty or School. To help managers identify the primary causes of work-related stress in their area, an on-line staff questionnaire has been developed. The new training course explains how to use this tool to evaluate levels and causes of stress, and provides guidance on how good management practices can help to mitigate stress in team members.

Directorate and Schools are being asked to develop action plans to tackle the causes of work-related stress.



For further information on stress management and staff wellbeing HR have a wellbeing section on their website:

<http://www.reading.ac.uk/internal/humanresources/WorkingatReading/HealthandWellbeing/humres-handwhome.aspx>

New Safety Guides

Three new or substantially revised Safety Guides have now been published on the H&SS web site:

- SG 12 Portable Appliance Testing
- SG32 Fieldwork
- SG38 Overseas travel

Lift safety

What to do if a passenger lift breaks down

Following two incidents when lift doors were wrongly forced open to release persons stuck inside a broken down lift, here is a reminder of what to do if passengers are trapped inside a lift.

If you are stuck in a lift

- Press the lift alarm button. You will need to hold this in for at least 3 seconds until the alarm sounds.
- Use the lift emergency phone or intercom system to contact Security Control.
- Remain calm. Sit or stand at the back of the lift away from the doors.
- Maintain contact with Security Control – use the emergency phone/intercom. Security will also come to the building and keep you informed of progress.
- Wait for a lift engineer to release you.

Staff – if the lift breaks down in your building, with passenger(s) in it:

- Use the indicator panel to identify where the lift has stuck.
- Go the nearest floor and check if there is someone stuck in the lift by calling out - or call Security Control on extn 6300 and ask them to dial the lift emergency number and make contact with anyone in the lift.
- Reassure the trapped person(s). Encourage them to maintain contact with Security Control via the emergency phone/intercom.
- Call Security on extn 6300 and check that they know that the lift has broken down. Make sure that Security are arranging for the lift engineer to be called out.

Some lifts are only designed as goods lifts. These must not be used to carry passengers.

FMD have good arrangements in place with lift companies to ensure a high standard of maintenance. Despite this, occasionally lifts break down. The response time for the lift engineer to arrive is up to 2 hours. If there is likely to be a long delay before the lift engineer arrives, or if a trapped person is in distress, as a last resort Security may call the Fire Service. However if you have a medical or other condition that would cause you distress if you were to be stuck in the lift, you are advised to use the stairs if you can.

Instructions on what to do are posted in all University of Reading lifts.

NEVER overload a lift, either with passengers or goods.

All lifts are clearly marked with the maximum load and passenger numbers. If you think the lift is full, do not enter.

NEVER attempt to force open lift doors or get out of a broken down lift until the lift engineer has arrived. They will take charge and release any trapped persons.

“Authorisation to Work”

If staff, students or other building occupants plan to carry out any work which might disturb the fabric of the building an ‘Authorisation to Work’ request form must be completed and submitted to Facilities Management Directorate (FMD).



This is to ensure that risks of all potential hazards associated with work are properly considered. These will include, but are not limited to asbestos, impact on services, structural stability and fire safety. It is important to understand that **any** work that is likely to disturb the fabric of the building must be considered. This includes even small installations and also work involving the removal of existing fixtures and fittings.

If you are considering the feasibility of any work and you are concerned that asbestos or other hazards may be an issue you can get preliminary advice from Sean Callaghan (Asbestos

Co-ordinator x8275) or Larry Woodley (Construction H&S Advisor x7290). Full information on the FMD policy and an “Authorisation to Work” request form can be found at: www.reading.ac.uk/web/FILES/fmd/Authorisation_to_Work_procedures.pdf

First aid training

First Aid training is now booked through Health and Safety Services, via self service on Trent, or by contacting the Health and Safety Services office.

There is a programme of courses for First Aiders, Emergency First Aiders and refreshers during the year. However it is very difficult to put together a programme that fits everyone’s diaries, so please plan ahead and book early. If courses aren’t filled, we have to cancel them, and disappoint other people who are booked to attend.

There is now a limited dispensation from HSE for refresher training. If your first aid certificate has expired, you have 28 days to attend the shorter 2 day refresher course. However we cannot guarantee that a course will be running within your 28 day grace period, so plan ahead.

If there is no University course running on a timescale that suits you, we recommend that you book onto an external course, arranged either through H&SS, or independently. Regrettably, these costs will need to be borne by the School/Department.

Audit programme

Health & Safety Services' audit programme for 2011-2012, including a number of specialist audits, has been published. The Schools and units involved are listed below.

- School of Arts and Communication Design
- School of Psychology and Clinical Language Sciences
- School of Biological Sciences
- FMD (Security, Cleaning Services, Estates Management)
- Governance Directorate

Specialist Audits

- Small works contractors
- Management of asbestos
- Fire safety in residential properties
- Local Exhaust Ventilation compliance
- Food premises

The lead auditor will contact the Head of School/unit prior to the audit to agree the scope and programme, and to request advance copies of documentation.

Working to improve safety

Throughout the year, FMD carry out works on the campus that fall into the category of health and safety-related. These works are generally to meet a specific legislative requirement, or to remedy a hazard that has been identified after an accident or during a periodic survey by the Maintenance team.

The need for such works is not always readily apparent, so it's worthwhile looking at a few examples:

- Adding glass or metal sheeting to stair or landing balustrades. This followed an accident when a parent was distracted by a conversation and their small child wandered off to the stairs. They slipped and went through a gap in the stair railing, falling to the next floor. Fortunately they suffered nothing more than a scare and some bruising. We looked at the options to prevent a recurrence; banning children was not sensible or feasible, so we chose to improve the stair guarding on several staircases.
- Improving edge markings on steps. The University has a proactive access policy, and has asked disabled people what would help them round campus. Painting yellow lines on the edges of steps helps a person with reduced vision to differentiate the edge of the step and hence reduces the chance of a trip or fall.
- Extending stair handrails. We have a few staircases where the handrail does not go all the way to the bottom step, leaving vulnerable people to negotiate the last couple of steps without assistance. In some cases, it also means the bottom steps form a trip hazard for visually impaired people, by jutting out into the corridor/landing area. So handrails are being extended to provide better protection.
- Installing glass protection. There is a legal requirement to protect glass in vulnerable areas i.e. where people might walk or fall into it, or put their hand through it. A quick look at some not so funny videos on the internet shows

that this is not uncommon. The University has many large panes of glass round campus. Where these are in vulnerable locations, safety film is being applied. This is a simple, low cost measure that protects against breakage, and should prevent UoR becoming a YouTube hit.

This is only a small sample of the wide range of safety works that FMD carry out every year. The aim is always to make the University of Reading a safe place. If you spot something you think is a hazard, report it to the FMD Helpdesk, extension 7000.

Winter driving

As I sit here writing, it's a lovely autumn afternoon, and a relatively balmy 14°C. That won't last. So are you and your car ready for winter?



7 degrees C. That's the figure you should be checking for, according to the AA. It's the crucial temperature at which the grip level of most all season tyres starts to drop off alarmingly. You should allow for greater stopping distances and cut your speed in corners. Tyres should be inflated to the correct pressure – read your handbook!

With the clocks going back (Saturday October 29th), the risks of winter driving increase. This may be your first driving in the dark for several months. In urban areas and on campus, look out for pedestrians in dark clothes and without any reflective material. In rural areas, watch out for farm vehicles as farmers take advantage of any good weather before winter sets in.

The weather will obviously deteriorate from now on, so check that all your car lights are functioning correctly, including the beam setting. Wiping clean the front and rear lights will make you more visible to other drivers.

Clean the inside of all vehicle glass, not just the windscreen, to aid visibility especially with the lower sun in the mornings, and clear the windows of any frost and condensation before setting off.

Also check that your number plate isn't obscured by dirt, that the wipers are in good condition, and that the washer bottle level is topped up with the right winter mix.

A final thought – the most dangerous time of the year for road collisions is between **3pm and 6pm on Fridays in November**. Be prepared!