

# Fire guidance

The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 and the Fire (Scotland) Act 2005/Fire Scotland Regulations 2006, which both repealed or replaced a multitude of fire safety legislation, now require the completion of a fire risk assessment to ensure safety from the risk of fire.

The following guidance is designed specifically for schools outside local authority control.

The legislation requires all workplaces (including schools) to:

- Complete a fire risk assessment of the school.
- The risk assessment must take into account all people who may be affected by a fire in the school and this can form part of the existing health and safety risk assessments.
- Include within the assessment consideration towards people with disabilities and special needs.
- Consider the safety of visitors in a fire situation.
- Record the risk assessment in writing if the school retains five or more employees.
- Provide adequate fire precautions to ensure that people who use the school are safe.
- Provide training and information to staff about the fire precautions in the school.

The risk assessment and its findings are then used to establish what fire precautions you need to provide, to ensure a safe environment for the pupils and staff.

## The fire risk assessment process

The first area you should consider is to investigate if any form of fire safety licensing or building legislation covers any part of the school.

These areas of the school may have had a fire risk assessment completed as part of this process. However, even if a licence or fire certificate covers all, or part, of the school, you still need to complete the fire risk assessment.

The fire risk assessment ensures fire safety is managed by the school and is used to establish how a fire could start, and if it did, how it would affect the staff, pupils and visitors.

The fire risk assessment will require a full walk through of the school and should include the following points:

- Identification of all the fire hazards in the school.
- Establish who could be in danger if a fire occurs and ensure that people can escape safely. Identify people in and around the premises and people who are especially at risk.
- Establish if your existing fire precautions are adequate, or identify if more should be done to get rid of or reduce the risk from fire as far as is reasonably possible.
- Take other measures to make sure there is protection if flammable or explosive materials are used or stored.
- Record findings of the risk assessment and note what has been done to reduce or eliminate the risks.
- The results of the findings should be given to your staff.
- Constantly keep the fire risk assessment under review to ensure it remains up-to-date.

To help with the completion of fire risk assessments, the Department for Communities and Local Government have produced a series of guides for different types of premises and a specific guide has been made available for Education. Information on fire safety management is included within the guide, including a section on fire risk assessment. Guides can be downloaded free from [www.firesafetyguides.communities.gov.uk](http://www.firesafetyguides.communities.gov.uk) or apply to DCLG, PO Box 236, Wetherby, West Yorkshire, LS23 7NB, or telephone 0870 1226 236.

The assessment should be completed in a structured manner to ensure all areas of the school are assessed. This should include outdoor areas as well as parts of the school that are rarely used.



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In larger schools it is recommended that the assessment be completed for separate buildings or departments, in order to make the task a little easier and clearer to understand.

If you have other organisations in your school, you will need to ensure the fire risk assessment is discussed with them. (Examples include leisure centres or other LEA or Council Departments).

Our experience shows that schools are potentially vulnerable to fires that are deliberately set. In view of this, the fire risk assessment will have to specifically include the risk of fires that could be started deliberately.

It is recommended that you start your fire risk assessment outside the school by assessing the potential arson risk and then work into the main school buildings.

The following points outline the areas that should be included in the fire risk assessment.

### External waste management

Due to the high risk of deliberately set fires, the grounds of the school should be clear of combustible storage and waste bins and skips should be located away from buildings, so if they are set on fire, the fire will not spread into the school.

The following points should be specifically assessed:

- All waste bins should be secured a minimum of 8m from the school buildings. This can be achieved by chaining the bins to a fixed point, or providing a secure compound area.
- All waste skips should be located a minimum of 8m from buildings. If possible, skips should have lids that are kept locked when not in use.
- Schools in conurbations may have difficulty in complying with the 8m recommendation. In such cases an assessment is needed to visualise the effect of a burning waste bin or skip that is closer to buildings. Factors that can reduce the risk of fire spreading into buildings can include positioning waste containers against or facing masonry walls without windows and without combustible overhangs such as timber soffits. If this is not possible a metal roofing over the containers might help to deflect flames away from the wall and roof. Otherwise the case for having lockable lids for the waste containers is considerably strengthened.

- All external litter bins should be emptied at the end of each day.
- Litter bins should not be fixed to combustible wall claddings of school buildings or be located in covered or recessed areas.
- Any recycling receptacles (particularly those containing paper and textiles) should be located and secured a minimum of 8m from the school buildings.
- Loose combustible materials should not be stored against or close to the school buildings.

### Temporary buildings

Because of their combustible nature, these buildings could pose a risk to the school if they are deliberately set on fire. Where possible, all mobile classrooms or temporary buildings should be located a minimum of 10 metres from the main school buildings.

In addition, the following points should be considered:

- Particular attention should be given to protecting the underside of the mobile classrooms, to prevent this area being used for storage and to reduce the potential for rubbish to accumulate.
- If the school uses timber sheds, then these should not be located close to buildings. Again a minimum distance of 10m is recommended.
- It is important to ensure all mobile classrooms are maintained in good condition.

### Building fabric

#### Condition

Assess the general condition of the buildings. Check if the building fabric is in good condition and identify if there are areas which could be more vulnerable to external fire setting due to its condition. The general fabric of the building may increase the fire risk if not kept in good condition. For example damaged external cladding may reveal an internal combustible lining or insulation or cavity where fire raisers could easily start a fire that could then spread extensively. If such areas are noted during the inspection, then these should be repaired as soon as possible.

As part of the assessment, assess the condition of the doors and windows of the school buildings. If these are in poor condition, or badly maintained, then this could provide easy access into the school buildings for persons causing malicious damage or deliberate fires.

# Fire guidance – continued

## Construction

The construction of the buildings will have a bearing on how quickly a fire will develop and spread throughout the school. In the main, these are inherent features that cannot be easily changed, however the construction must be considered as part of the assessment process. It is important, therefore, to establish if there are any areas of combustible construction. In these areas, additional care should be taken to ensure that occupants can escape quickly and safely.

## Internal features

As part of the assessment, note the construction of the internal walls. Are they of combustible construction?

Are there combustible linings, (such as pin boards or notice boards) that could help a fire spread quickly inside the building? If so, can these be eliminated, covered with safety glass or changed to boards of non-combustible materials?

Particular attention should be paid to potential voids at ceiling or roof level. These voids are notorious for allowing fire to spread quickly through school buildings. If possible, the ceiling voids should be inspected to establish their extent. Specific guidance on this point may be obtainable from your Local Authority.

If the void exists, then it should be protected with fire resisting barriers in accordance with current building regulations. We can provide specific advice on this point, if it is required. The key point, however, is identifying the risk so it can be addressed.

If the school has areas that are more than one storey in height then floor openings, such as stairs and lifts, should be protected to provide a minimum of 30 minutes fire resistance, to prevent fire spread between floors additionally any glazing overlooking external fire escapes must also be fire resisting. To help identification, in most cases this will comprise fire doors containing wired glass panels and smoke seals. Doors containing standard glazing or polycarbonate will not be fire separation doors.

## Electrical hazards

Electrical problems are a major cause of fire. However, in most cases, a good standard of maintenance can significantly reduce this risk.

The fire risk assessment should check the following:

### Main fixed electrical installation

To comply with Institute of Electrical Engineers (IEE) Regulations the main electrical installation should be tested every five years by an approved electrical contractor accredited by one of the following:

- UKAS – United Kingdom Accreditation Service
- NICEIC – National Inspection Council for Electrical Installation Contracting
- ECA – Electrical Contractors Association
- SELECT – Electrical Contractors Association for Scotland

In addition to the installation inspection, electrical safety can be managed by the school, taking note of the following:

- No temporary wiring should be used as the cables can become damaged and create a fire risk.
- Where possible avoid the use of multi-point adapters as these can overload sockets.
- The main electrical switch room should not be used as a storage area. It is particularly important to ensure that this area is not used for the storage of combustible items.

### Portable electrical appliance testing (PAT)

It is a statutory requirement that a competent person should test portable electrical appliances. The 'competent person' could be an electrical contractor, though premises staff can be trained and equipped for this work.

**Note that PAT applies to all portable electrical appliances, including those brought into the school by staff, pupils or parents.**

# Fire guidance – continued

## Heating

Faulty heating systems can often cause fires.

As part of the risk assessment, establish what type of heating is used in the school.

Central heating systems are generally safe, but the following points should be in place:

- The boilers should be subject to an annual maintenance contract.
- Automatic fuel cut-off devices should be installed.
- The boiler room should not be used for combustible storage.
- Ideally a fire detector linked into the fire alarm system should protect the boiler room.
- There should be manual break glass points in the boiler room, linked into the fire alarm system.
- The room should be provided with a suitable fire extinguisher.
- If the heating system is a fuel oil system, the external oil tank should be fitted with a bund wall, to catch any leakage of oil. It is also important to ensure that this banded area is kept clear of any storage and any water accumulation is drained regularly.

Temporary heating appliances should be avoided wherever possible. If they must be used then they should be electrical convection heaters, which are inspected annually as part of the Portable Appliance Testing.

Heaters using Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG), radiant bars or exposed naked flames must not be used.

## Control of contractors

It is important to ensure that contractors are monitored and controlled when working on the school site as their presence and activity may well affect normal fire or security arrangements.

In particular, their attendance should be arranged beforehand and on arrival, they should report to a nominated individual where their presence and time of arrival are recorded.

Monitoring of activity is particularly important if the contractors are using any hot work processes as part of their work. Hot work refers to any areas of construction or refurbishment, where the use of heat is required as part of the process. (This can include blowtorches for plumbing, roofing and painting work, welding, bitumen boilers for roofing work etc).

In order to ensure a co-ordinated approach, a hot work permit scheme should be introduced. The permit scheme ensures that contractors are implementing procedures that will reduce the risk of a fire. A copy of a hot work permit can be supplied on request.

## School areas of higher fire risk

In general terms, the risk of a fire starting in a school is relatively low; however there are some areas where the risks are considered to be higher. Listed below are areas of potentially higher fire risk.

### Design Technology/Resistant Materials

The following points should be assessed:

- A high standard of housekeeping should be enforced. Sawdust and combustible waste materials should be regularly cleared from areas around machinery or areas where heat is used (i.e. welding bays, forges etc.).
- All timber in the wood stores should be stacked neatly and the general standard of housekeeping should be high.
- Suitable fire extinguishers should be provided.
- Fire blankets should be provided in all areas, as there is a risk of fire involving clothing.
- Highly flammable liquids and hazardous substances should be stored safely (in accordance with your COSHH assessment).
- All electrical equipment and machinery should be tested as part of the Portable Appliance Testing system.
- If large woodworking machines are used, localised dust extraction systems should be provided.
- Emergency electrical and mains gas shut off switches should be provided.
- Accessible, remote gas shut-off valves should be provided. Gas supplies should be isolated at night. It is preferable for restarting of the supply to only be enabled by a key operation.
- The need for oxygen and acetylene cylinders should be reviewed to ascertain whether they are required for teaching purposes. Any redundant or empty cylinders should be removed. If cylinders are required it is best to pipe in the gases from a secure well-ventilated location. If cylinders have to be kept internally then a small trolley-mounted set is preferable to a large industrial size set. All cylinders should be inspected regularly.

# Fire guidance – continued

## Art and Design

The following points should be assessed:

- The immediate area around the kiln(s) should be kept clear of combustible storage.
- All electrical equipment (including the kiln, irons, cooking appliances) should be tested as part of the Portable Appliance Testing system.
- Highly flammable liquids should be stored safely (in accordance with your COSHH assessment). Particular attention should be given to printing inks. If these are flammable, can alternative water based inks be used? (This reduces the need for solvents and their associated hazards).
- A good standard of housekeeping should be maintained. Materials should be neatly stacked and stored in closed cupboards if possible. Poorly stored, loose materials will allow a fire to develop and spread very quickly.

## Science Department

The following points should be assessed:

- Highly flammable liquids and hazardous substances should be stored safely (in accordance with your COSHH assessment).
- Spillage kits (for dealing with small spillages of hazardous substances) should be provided in preparation rooms and chemical stores.
- Chemical stores should incorporate high and low level ventilation, spark proof lighting systems and the door should be clearly marked, indicating the contents.
- Fume cupboards should be tested on an annual basis.
- Accessible, remote gas shut-off valves should be provided. Gas supplies should be isolated at night. It is preferable for restarting of the supply to only be enabled by a key operation.
- Appropriate fire extinguishers should be provided.
- Fire blankets should be provided in all areas, as there is a risk of fire involving clothing.

## Main Hall and Stage

The following points should be assessed:

- Establish if the main hall has an Entertainment Licence. (This may be required if visitors are charged for performances). The licence will cover the hall and surrounding area, but a fire risk assessment must still be completed.

- Never exceed the maximum numbers for performances allowed under the entertainment licence.
- All electrical equipment should be tested as part of the Portable Appliance Testing system.
- Review storage under the stage. In addition, this storage area should be kept locked when not in use.
- Appropriate fire extinguishers should be provided.
- All fire exits must be clearly marked and kept clear of obstruction.

## Kitchens

In many cases, separate contractors may run the kitchen; however, the school is still required to complete a risk assessment in this area.

The following points should be assessed:

- Appropriate fire extinguishers and fire blankets should be provided. If the area uses deep fat fryers then a Class F fire extinguisher should be provided (see section on fire extinguishers).
- Accessible, remote gas shut-off valves should be provided.
- If there is an extraction system above the cooking area, the filters and hood should be cleaned regularly (ideally weekly) and the main extraction ductwork including any associated internal fans should be cleaned annually.
- Any automatic wet chemical fire suppression system protecting the cooking range should be maintained in accordance with the manufacturers instructions.

## Food Technology

The following points should be assessed:

- If applicable, accessible remote gas shut-off valves should be provided. Gas supplies should be isolated at night.
- It is preferable for restarting of the supply to only be enabled by a key operation.
- Appropriate fire extinguishers should be provided.
- Fire blankets should be provided in all areas, as there is a risk of fire involving clothing.
- All electrical equipment (including cookers, washing machines, tumble dryers, irons etc) should be tested as part of the Portable Appliance Testing system.

## Fire guidance – continued

- Wall displays above cookers should be kept to a minimum as these can be set on fire during cooking and then spread the fire quickly.
- Extraction systems for tumble dryers should be cleaned regularly.

In all the above areas it is important to ensure that storage is kept neat and tidy.

In particular, it is important to ensure all escape routes and fire exits doors are kept clear of combustible storage.

### Fire detection and warning

The risk assessment process must establish if there are adequate means to warn people of a fire in the school. This usually takes the form of an electrical fire alarm but small schools, or small buildings on larger school sites, may instead rely on hand bells, whistles or a manually operated fire alarm bell.

The key test is to ensure that the fire alarm system can be heard throughout the entire school in all circumstances. If there are areas where the alarm may not be heard, such as machine rooms in design technology or music practice room, the audible alarm should be supplemented by a flashing beacon to alert occupants.

You must also establish if there are fire warning devices for any disabled visitors/employees.

Suitable 'action to take in the event of fire' notices must be provided in all areas.

For fire alarm systems, the following points must be implemented:

- The fire alarm must be tested weekly and these tests should be recorded.
- Adequate fire alarm call points should be available around the school.
- Fire drills should be held at least once per term and these should be recorded.
- Suitable evacuation instructions should be provided for any visitors.

### Automatic fire alarm systems

If the school is protected by an automatic fire detection system, this should be noted as part of the fire risk assessment process. It is recommended that the following points are noted and considered:

- Note the installer and if the system was installed in accordance with BS 5839.

- Provide details in your assessment of any maintenance agreement, automatic links of any system activation to a remote alarm monitoring centre and areas of the school that are covered by the system.
- Note if high-risk areas are covered – i.e. kitchens, boiler room, DT, arts, science, food technology, storage areas etc. If not, can the system be extended to cover these areas?
- Where the fire alarm is transmitted to a remote alarm monitoring centre, due to the likelihood of malicious alarm activation, sometimes it is necessary to filter out all signals during school hours. Such disablement is to be by arrangement with the alarm monitoring centre but is to be active at least whenever the premises are unoccupied. Even when signalling is provided, the 999 public emergency system should also be used to summon the fire service. Advice should also be sought from the Fire Safety Officer of your local fire service.

### Fire evacuation

Fire evacuation can be a very complicated issue to assess and address. If problems are noted, then advice should be sought from the local Fire Safety Officer of your local fire service.

### Means of escape

A general risk assessment can help to identify any problems. The main point to consider is that the time available for escape (i.e. how quickly an escape route could become dangerous in a fire) must be longer than the actual time needed to escape from the school. It is important to ensure that once staff are aware of a fire, they should be able to leave the school buildings quickly and safely.

As part of the risk assessment process you will need to plan the evacuation of the school. You need to take into account all the staff, pupils and visitors, including planning for the evacuation of disabled persons. This will form an integral part of the school's emergency plan and must be included in training given to staff. It is recommended that a simultaneous evacuation should be used at all school premises.

This ensures all areas of the school are evacuated at the same time and this will help with roll calls of staff and pupils. Even in large sites with a number of buildings, this position should still be maintained as staff and pupils regularly move between buildings during the school day.

## Fire guidance – continued

Fire action notices must be on display throughout the school. These should include:

- What to do if you discover a fire.
- What to do if the fire alarm sounds.
- How to call the fire service.

Fire escape routes must be clearly marked. All fire escape signs should be located in places that clearly indicate escape routes. The signs must be white on green and include a 'running man' pictogram.

### Escape routes

Ideally there should be an alternative means of escape from all parts of the school.

Routes providing a means of escape in only one direction should be avoided as this means that people may have to move towards a fire to escape.

The escape routes should be separate from each other and laid out so people can move away from the fire to escape.

Escape routes should always lead to a place of safety and be wide enough to cope with the number of people who may use it.

The escape routes must be kept clear of obstructions at all times and must not be used for storage.

All combustible linings should be removed from escape routes.

You may need to make special arrangements for staff and pupils with disabilities so this should be included in any risk assessment.

### Stairways

Stairways should be wide enough for the number of people who may need to use them in an emergency situation.

Fire resisting partitions and fire resisting, self-closing doors should enclose the stairs. Depending on the use of the building and the amount of people on the upper floors, an alternative staircase may be needed to provide adequate means of escape.

There are allowable exceptions, but specialist advice should be sought from the Fire Safety Officer, if the risk assessment raises concerns.

It is important to ensure that escape stairways are not used for any form of storage as this may impede safe exit from the premises.

### Exhibitions and displays

Any exhibitions or displays, particularly those with large quantities of combustible materials such as paper and textiles, can help a fire to spread quickly. In view of this, the types of displays in potential escape routes should be carefully considered and kept to a minimum where possible.

Notice boards can also create issues that need to be addressed. They should be kept as small and as tidy as possible and away from heat sources, such as heating appliances.

### Other items prohibited on escape routes

- Portable heaters of any kind.
- Any heaters with radiant bars.
- Cooking appliances.
- Upholstered furniture.
- Coat racks.
- Temporary storage (particularly combustible items).
- Gas boilers (unless permitted under building regulations and installed in accordance with the gas safety regulations).
- Vending machines.
- All electrical equipment (other than normal lighting, escape lighting, fire alarm systems, intruder alarm systems).

### Fire doors

It is important to understand the difference between a fire door and a fire exit door. A fire door is designed and installed to prevent fire quickly spreading through a building. A fire exit door on the other hand is designed to let people out of a building.

The main points to consider are:

- In most cases fire doors should be labelled 'fire door – keep shut' and be fitted with self-closing devices.
- Fire doors on cupboards, boiler rooms or other areas of higher fire risk do not need to have self-closing devices, but instead should be kept locked when not used and marked with, 'fire door keep locked' signs.
- Fire doors on corridors and stairwells should be kept closed when not used, unless they are held open by automatic release mechanisms, linked into the fire alarm system. These doors should be marked 'automatic fire door – keep clear' and must be kept clear of obstructions to ensure they close effectively.

# Fire guidance – continued

## Fire exit doors

The main points to consider are as follows:

- In most cases fire exit doors should open in the direction of travel. This is particularly important for doors that have to cope with a large amount of people (an example in schools would be doors from the main hall).
- The doors should be able to be opened from the inside, without the use of a key. Locking mechanisms such as panic devices and push bars are normally used to secure these doors.
- If the door needs to be secured for security reasons, alternative secure locking systems can be used. The important point here though is that there is a clearly understood procedure in place which will ensure that the additional out of hours locking devices are disengaged whenever the door is required as a fire exit. Advice can be sought from the fire safety officer in these instances.

## Emergency lighting

As part of the fire risk assessment, you must also assess whether or not there is sufficient lighting available to ensure that occupants can escape safely, particularly in the hours of darkness or if power is cut as the result of a fire.

Consider use of the school in the evenings for parent evenings, meetings, performances etc., and particularly in the winter months when in many parts of the UK it is dark in the late afternoon.

This assessment should be done with normal lights turned off. If the lighting levels are poor, emergency lighting will be required. The emergency lighting should operate if the normal lighting system fails for any reason, because this is possible in a fire situation.

The following areas should be given specific attention and provided with lighting if necessary:

- Escape routes – both internal and external if necessary. (External lighting may be needed if the route from the building is potentially hazardous).
- Final exit points from the school.
- Locations directly above fire alarm points and fire extinguishers.
- Highlighting hazards in escape routes – i.e. changes to floor level, staircases and changes of direction in escape routes.

In small schools, the fire risk assessment can recommend that battery powered or rechargeable torches would be adequate.

This is an acceptable solution, provided that the situation is well managed and staff are trained in their use.

## Fire fighting equipment

The provision of appropriate fire fighting equipment is a requirement of the legislation and if used correctly, can quickly put out a fire and prevent it developing into a serious incident.

It is important to ensure that the correct types of fire extinguisher are provided. In most cases, standard water extinguishers will be adequate, but there may be areas of higher risk where the use of water to put out a fire would not be appropriate. To help with the risk assessment process, British Standard EN 3 fire extinguishers are classified into the following categories. Examples are given to highlight the areas where each type of fire may occur in a school.

- Class A – fires involving solid materials, in which combustion takes place with the formation of glowing embers (textiles, timber, paper etc – i.e. most classrooms, staff room, etc.).
- Class B – fires involving liquids or liquefied solids (highly flammable liquids – i.e. sciences, DT etc.).
- Class C – Fires involving gases (Boiler room, DT, food technology, kitchen, and science).
- Class D – Fires involving metals (DT, science).
- Class F – Fires involving cooking oils/fats (kitchen and food technology).

Your fire risk assessment should help you decide what type of fire extinguisher is required and further information can be obtained from your fire extinguisher supplier.

Fire extinguishers themselves are available in four main categories:

- Water.
- Foam.
- Dry Powder.
- CO<sub>2</sub>.

## Fire guidance – continued

Some fire extinguishers can be used on more than one type of fire. Fire extinguishers are now coloured red or stainless steel with up to 5% of the body, or sometimes the handle, colour coded to indicate the extinguisher type as per the following table.

Classification of fire risk	Water (red)	Foam/AFFF (cream)	Co <sub>2</sub> (black)	Dry Powder (blue)
<b>A</b> Paper, wood, textiles, fabrics	✓	✓		✓
<b>B</b> Flammable liquids		✓		✓
<b>C</b> Flammable gases			✓	✓
<b>D</b> Metals				✓
<b>F</b> Cooking Fat fires		✓		
– Electrical Fires			✓	✓

As a general rule, one 9 litre water fire extinguisher (or its equivalent) should be provided for each 200m<sup>2</sup> of floor space, with a minimum of one per floor.

In addition, areas of special risk, such as deep fat frying in kitchens, electrical equipment (such as photocopiers, computers etc.) will need a fire extinguisher suitable for that type of risk.

All fire extinguishers should conform to the British standard or BAFF/LPC schemes.

Following introduction of BSEN 3 in 1997, all fire extinguishers are now coloured red, however, fire extinguishers should still be colour-coded to indicate their type. As a concession to the UK, up to 5% of the fire extinguisher is allowed to be coloured to identify the extinguisher type (see table above).

It is important to know that extinguishers do not need to be upgraded or changed to comply with the standard, unless they no longer work effectively.

Staff should be familiar with the location and basic operation of fire extinguishers, in case they need to use them in an emergency. However, if your fire strategy recommends that certain people (like appointed fire marshals) take a more active role, then they should be provided with comprehensive training.

It is important to stress in fire strategies that if staff are in doubt, they should concentrate on raising the alarm and evacuating the building rather than fire fighting.

### Fire extinguisher locations

Where possible, fire extinguishers should be located in areas where they are easily accessible. They should be hung on the wall and to avoid problems lifting them, the handle of the larger extinguishers should be approximately 1m above ground level. Smaller extinguishers can be located at a higher level if required.

Fire blankets should be provided in areas such as kitchens, where there is the risk of a deep fat fryer fire, or in DT and science where there is a risk of a fire involving clothing. The blankets should be wall mounted, in an accessible location and comply with the relevant British standard – BS 6575 – the specification for fire blankets.

### Maintenance and testing

It is important to ensure that all items of fire safety equipment are well maintained and located in the correct places, so if there is a fire, the equipment will work effectively.

In view of this, the fire risk assessment process must also incorporate maintenance and inspection programmes which form part of the day to day running of the school.

The inspection and maintenance programme should be a daily process for aspects that can be easily checked in-house, with maintenance contracts with specialist companies introduced for inspections of alarms, emergency lighting and fire extinguishers.

## Fire guidance – continued

### Modern buildings

Modern schools incorporate architectural design features such as atria. Such building features can assist in vertical fire spread between floors. A fire strategy is often produced at a design stage to ensure that building features and protection methods allow for safe egress of occupants in the event of a fire. School management in such buildings should ensure that the assumptions and qualifications within the fire strategy continue to be upheld during the lifetime of the building. For example the strategy may assume that there is to be no significant storage of combustible materials at the base of an atrium.

### Fire sprinklers

Many new schools have the benefit of automatic fire sprinkler protection. Sprinklers provide a very reliable method of controlling, and in most cases extinguishing, a fire. Maintenance of sprinkler systems will need to be carried out on a regular basis by competent sprinkler engineers. The engineers will have given advice on the need for weekly tests, checking of any alarm links and the recording of test results.

School management during their regular inspections can also ensure that the protection will continue to be effective by reporting any leaks to the sprinkler engineers, not hanging any material from sprinkler pipe work, preventing storage of materials to within 0.5 metres of the height of heads and advising the engineers of any possible obstructions such as new suspended ceilings or partitions.

The following table outlines good practice for the testing and maintenance of fire safety equipment.

### Maintenance and testing of fire safety related equipment

Equipment Period Action

Equipment	Period	Action
Fire-detection and fire-warning systems (including self contained smoke alarms and manually operated devices)	Weekly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Check all systems for state of repair and operation</li> <li>• Repair or replace defective units</li> <li>• Test operations of systems (a different call point should be tested each week in a rotation system)</li> </ul>
	Annually	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full check and test of system by a competent service engineer</li> <li>• Clean self-contained smoke alarms and change batteries</li> </ul>
Emergency lighting (including self-contained units)	Weekly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Operate torches and replace batteries</li> <li>• Repair or replace defective units</li> </ul>
	Monthly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Check all systems, units and torches for state of repair and function</li> </ul>
	Annually	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full check and test of system by a competent service engineer</li> <li>• Replace torch batteries</li> </ul>
Fire fighting equipment (including hose reels)	Weekly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Check all extinguishers including hose reels for correct installation and apparent function</li> <li>• Check all safety pins are in place</li> </ul>
	Annually	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full check and test by a competent service engineer</li> </ul>

# Fire guidance – continued

## Fire-detection and fire-warning systems

### Weekly

- Check all systems for state of repair and operation (including self contained smoke alarms).
- Repair or replace defective units and manually operated devices.
- Test operation of systems (a different call point should be tested each week in a rotation system).

### Annually

- Full check and test of system by a competent service engineer.
- Clean self-contained smoke alarms and change batteries.

## Emergency lighting

### Weekly

- Operate torches and replace batteries (including self contained units).
- Repair or replace defective units.

### Monthly

- Check all systems, units and torches for state of repair and function.

### Annually

- Full check and test of system by a competent service engineer.
- Replace torch batteries.

## Fire fighting equipment

### Weekly

- Check all extinguishers including hose reels for (including hose reels) correct installation and apparent function.
- Check all safety pins are in place.

### Annually

- Full check and test by a competent service engineer.

It is strongly recommended that you keep records of all maintenance and testing of equipment as this will be useful if you are asked by the fire authority to prove that you have effective systems in place.

## Completed assessment – what now?

Once you have completed your fire risk assessment, there may be areas in the school where improvements are required to reduce the risk of fire.

In order to ensure these are recorded and dealt with effectively, it is recommended that an action plan is produced.

The action plan should list the recommendations and you should emphasise their importance by using a priority system as follows:

**Priority 1** Issues that require urgent attention within 2 weeks.

**Priority 2** Issues that require prompt attention within 3 months.

**Priority 3** Issues that require longer term consideration.

You should then implement a planned programme to complete the recommendations as soon as possible. It will not be considered acceptable to simply complete the assessment and not implement the required fire safety improvements.

Finally, the fire risk assessment should be continually reviewed and form part of the fire safety policy of the school.

For more information visit: [www.RiskCurriculum.co.uk](http://www.RiskCurriculum.co.uk)

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