



Safety Matters

Health & Safety Services Newsletter - Number 52

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**Health & Safety Services
Facilities Management Directorate**

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The Health and Safety team

We are pleased to say that two new members have now joined the team. They are Jon Crabb and Jennifer Folliard. Both of them have an Environmental Health inspection background – but do not fear, they are here to help you!



They have been allocated specific areas of the University to look after, and will be coming out to visit Heads of Schools and Area Health and Safety Co-ordinators over the next few months.

Contact details for the whole team are on the H&SS web site.

Evacuation of disabled people



A University working party has been established to review current evacuation procedures for disabled people and to promote best practice. Recent disability legislation has led to improved access into our buildings for disabled people. It is important that evacuation arrangements keep pace with this, because the University is responsible for the safe evacuation

of disabled people in the event of a fire or other emergency.

In most of our buildings disabled people on upper floors are expected to go to a place of relative safety protected from the possible effects of a fire, and to wait there while the situation is assessed (look for the green 'refuge' signs). The fact that many of our buildings have fire detection systems means that the potential problem area, where there might be a fire, can be identified quickly. This assists managers responsible for the evacuation, and the emergency services, to decide whether or not they need to assist disabled people out of a building, or whether the disabled person is safe to remain where they are.

The working party is being asked for advice on how current procedures might be improved, and equally importantly, how to make sure that everyone involved understands and follows the procedures.

Revised guidance (Safety Guide 6) is now being prepared by the Health and Safety Services team and this will be disseminated as widely as possible. In the meantime, Schools/Departments are asked to check that their local procedures enable the Evacuation Officer to identify:

- a) how many disabled people there are in the building at the time of the fire alarm sounding
- b) the nature of their disabilities
- a) the refuge where they are located.

Disabled people who normally work in one building should also have their own personal emergency evacuation plan (PEEP) worked out in advance, in consultation with the building management. This means that the disabled person, any helper or Fire Warden, and the building management know where the disabled person is likely to be after the fire alarm sounds.

The Health and Safety team can provide guidance on the use of PEEPS – contact Keith Oxley on Extn 8282 or email safety@rdg.ac.uk.

Avian flu

Members of the University cannot fail to have become aware of the media speculation and “doom and gloom” scenarios about Avian Flu, and its possible impact on the UK. There has also been a lot of confusion between Avian (bird) flu and Pandemic flu, as many flu experts are expecting a new pandemic [world-wide epidemic] of a novel strain of human influenza, derived from the current high-pathogenicity avian strain H5N1. However, it must be emphasized that the transition of the avian virus to a human virus remains a theoretical possibility. Although the current avian virus has infected humans, all the evidence points to the fact that exposure to high levels of virus (for example by handling dead birds that have been killed by the virus) is required.

A Contingency Plan for the University is being developed to identify actions required to minimise the effects of a case or outbreak of avian flu in birds or humans on the campus. This Plan will also identify actions necessary if a human pandemic occurs, whether the disease is present in a part of the world to be visited by a member of the University, or on the campus. In the meantime the “What’s New” page of the H&SS website

[\[http://www.fmd.rdg.ac.uk/safety/whatsNew.asp\]](http://www.fmd.rdg.ac.uk/safety/whatsNew.asp)

contains “information for travellers” who may visit areas in which outbreaks of avian flu have occurred. This “portal” will be expanded as necessary as more information becomes available.

Statutory inspection of equipment

Many items of plant and equipment in labs and plant rooms require a statutory engineering insurance inspections e.g. pressure vessels, fixed fume cupboards, lifting beams etc. Facilities Management Directorate are responsible for arranging this for building systems and items on the FMD asset register. However it is possible that departments may buy in their own equipment and may not recognise the need for this equipment to be inspected and tested.

Examples of the type of departmental equipment that need a statutory inspection include:

Pressure Systems Autoclaves, hot water generators, portable compressors.

Lifting Equipment Portable cranes, lifting accessories (slings, block & tackle etc.)

Process machinery Power presses, guillotines, guarded process machinery.

Local exhaust ventilation Mobile fume hoods, shot blasting units, safety cabinets.

It is a departmental responsibility to ensure that these inspections are organised. Further advice is available from Health and Safety Services and from the FMD Helpline on Extn 7000.

Updates to Safety Guides

New and updated Safety Guides have been published on the H&SS web site, covering: Safety Guide 14 - Control of Biological Hazards (Part 1 – University Procedures; Part 3, Hazard Categorisation of Biological Agents); a new Safety Guide 28 on the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH); and the use of Display Screen Equipment (Safety Guide 13).

Have you completed a Display Screen Assessment recently?

An inadequate workstation, or poor working technique, can lead to potentially chronic health problems. The assessment form in Safety Guide 13 will help you to assess your workstation and identify any necessary improvements, either to layout, or to your working practices. Schools/Departments have a responsibility to make sure that assessments are completed, and to follow up on deficiencies.

Risk assessment

Schools and Directorates have been asked to update their risk registers and return copies of the risk register AND the risk assessments to Health and Safety Services by **28 April 2006**.

Risk assessment is essential to the University’s success in managing health and safety and promoting a pro-active approach to risk management. Heads of School/Directorate are responsible for ensuring that risk assessments are prepared, understood by staff, implemented, and reviewed.

Forthcoming legislation

The **Noise at Work Regulations** take effect from 6 April 2006, with a two year transitional period for the music and entertainment industry until 6 April 2008. The new first Action Level is 80 dB(A) and a peak value of 112 pascals, the second Action Level is 85 dB(A) and 140 pascals. There is also a new limit value of 87 dB(A) and 200 pascals, which takes into account the reduction afforded by hearing protection.

Remember that these values apply as an average across an eight hour working day.

These revised Actions Levels mark a significant reduction in the noise levels to which workers can be exposed. It is therefore recommended that Schools and Directorates:

- Check noise levels in e.g. workshops, or during activities that can generate noise, such as when using impact tools, or driving tractors and grass cutting machines.
- Decide if you need to do more to limit exposure. Use HSE's noise exposure calculator to calculate a noise dose <http://www.hse.gov.uk/noise/calculator.htm>.
- Check that signage is in place to identify areas where hearing protection is mandatory.



If the noise levels are close to the new limits, the first priority is to try to reduce the noise at source, then to control exposure by engineering solutions, limiting the duration of exposure, etc.

Remember that you also have to provide information and training to employees who are exposed to noise, including information on the potential risk to hearing.

Protect yourself

- Wear ear defenders when carrying out noisy work or when in a hearing protection zone
- Make sure ear defenders are in good condition and that you wear them correctly
- Report noise hazards to management
- Don't forget noise outside work – protect your hearing.

Radioactive source disposal – Can you afford it?

The University has been offered funding by the Environment Agency to assist in the disposal costs for two surplus radioactive items. In one

case, the offer was limited to 50% funding for disposal of the sealed source in a redundant instrument (which had been accepted by as a gift, but could not be economically repaired). This has left the department to pick up 50% of the disposal costs. In the other case the EA offered 100% funding for the disposal of a small gas cylinder of Uranium hexafluoride. However, the EA grant does not pay the VAT involved in the disposal costs, which means that the “owners” of the cylinder are faced with a VAT bill of over £9000. This should act as a warning that if a School/Department acquires a radioactive source either as a gift or as a purchase, the ultimate disposal costs must be taken into account. Often, radioactive sources in equipment will be taken back by the manufacturer, but if the manufacturer goes out of business, any successor may decline to accept responsibility for redundant sources, leaving the School or Department to pick up the disposal costs. Exceptionally, the Government has provided money to assist with the disposal costs, but this programme is likely to finish within the next year. To take advantage of this programme, contact Malcolm Iosson on Extn. 8887 as soon as possible.

Children and pets in the workplace

The University Health and Safety Committee was recently asked to consider whether children and pets could be brought into the workplace. The Committee agreed that the University is a place of work, and is not designed for children. The recent fatality in an Edinburgh office of a 21 month old toddler, who squeezed through a gap in a banister and fell 15 feet, identifies what can go tragically wrong when children are left unsupervised, if only for a moment. Staff and students are therefore discouraged from bringing children into the workplace. It is however recognised that members of staff may wish to bring their children into work in exceptional circumstances, so they should observe the new guidance given on Health and Safety Services web site (on the A-Z page under C). It is also recognised that educational visits and visits to facilities specifically designed for children, such as the University museums, are to be encouraged.

With the exception of hearing dogs or guide dogs, pets are not allowed in University buildings, and should not be brought into the workplace. Any dogs brought onto the campus must always be kept on a lead.

Feature on Slips and trips

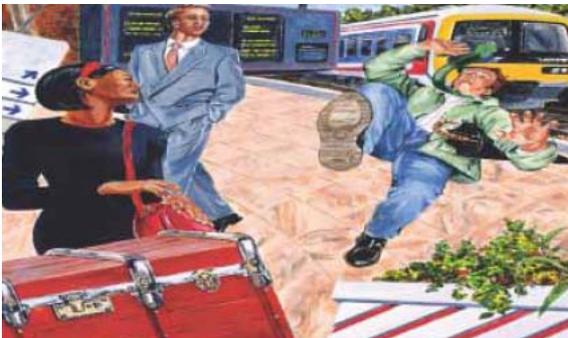
Slips and trips account for the highest number of major injuries and occur in all types of work. They have propelled themselves into the Health and Safety Commission's Hall of Shame and are included as one of the 5 Priority Programme topics in the Government's Revitalizing Health and Safety Campaign.

The main causes are:

- slipping on a surface that is wet or contaminated
- tripping over an obstruction
- slipping or tripping on surfaces such as steps, pavements, ramps and roads
- tripping over an uneven floor surface

In addition slips and trips often lead to other types of accidents, such as some machinery accidents, scalding and probably over one third of falls from height.

Last year in the University there were 21 accidents involving people slipping or tripping. These resulted in two members of staff suffering a major injury (broken bone or torn ligament) and a further 3 members of staff having more than 3 days off work. In addition 3 members of the public had to be taken to hospital.



What's stopping us from sorting it out?

Research shows that the biggest barriers to getting management and workers to address slips and trips effectively are:

1. **Not taking the risk seriously.** Such accidents are often seen as a joke (the proverbial banana skin).
2. **Not understanding the causes of slipping.** A common cause is slipping on smooth floors contaminated with water or other fluids.
3. **Thinking that slips and trips are inevitable.** They are not!
4. **Poor management control.**

What can we do?

Everyone in the University can do their bit to prevent these accidents. Here's a few hints and tips, starting from first principles:

- If your work involves workplace design, pay attention to ways of reducing the chances of objects or liquids being ejected or spilt. Avoid single steps, mark step edges, provide power points to avoid trailing cables, design out steep slopes, provide good lighting and visibility, specify slip resistant floors in vulnerable areas like entrance ways and kitchens.
- In kitchens, catering areas and labs prevent contamination e.g. stop spillages of liquids, powders and objects where possible by using suitable containers, dust extraction etc.
- Ensure that there are suitable cleaning and drying regimes and that procedures are followed.
- Provide effective matting, in particular at entrances to building to absorb water from people's feet as they enter the building.
- Keep walkways clear and clean up objects and spillages effectively and quickly.
- Do not leave smooth floors damp.
- Where slipping risks remain provide slip resistant footwear.
- Encourage people to take care, particularly to avoid rushing, use handrails, pick up objects, remove obstructions, use cordless tools, mark and cover trailing cables.

Doing more harm than good?

It's one of the easiest mistakes to make. You accidentally spill some coffee or water onto a smooth floor. Being a good colleague you grab the mop and wipe it. But you've just created an even bigger hazard. By mopping the floor, you've increased the size of the wet area several times. The damp floor may be almost indistinguishable in appearance from the rest of the area. But it could take around seven minutes to dry and throughout that time the area will be extremely slippery.

Simply by soaking up the spillage and drying the small area of floor with a paper towel would do the trick!

More information is available on the HSE web site, see the links below:

Slips and Trips Home page & Campaign
<http://www.hse.gov.uk/slips/index.htm>
<http://www.hse.gov.uk/slips/campaign.htm>
Preventing slip and trip incidents in the education sector <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/edis2.pdf>