

Information, training and safe systems!

A UK higher education establishment has been found guilty under the Health and Safety at Work Act of failing to adequately protect, train and supervise its staff, in that it had failed to safely store and manage a hazardous substance. This again highlights the need for adequate information, training and safe systems of work.

The incident which led to the prosecution resulted in a lecturer being badly injured when a litre container of nitric acid became unstable and exploded in a workshop. The institution was fined £14,000 and required to pay £18,000 costs. The magistrate is quoted as saying that there had been a 'very serious breach of health and safety duties'.

Underpinning the successful prosecution by HSE was the fact that the lecturer had not been trained in the activity that he was undertaking. Nor were procedures in place for the storage and management of this particular hazardous substance.

Hazardous goods at Reading

On a related topic, the University has experienced its own problems with the safe receipt and storage of hazardous goods. Schools/ departments are therefore reminded that they must:

- Consider if they need to use hazardous materials, or if there are safer alternatives;
- Have a procedure for taking receipt of, and signing for, hazardous goods;
- Designate a secure place to store hazardous goods as soon as they are delivered to a University building (temporary storage in an open foyer is not acceptable);

- Provide training for staff in how to recognise that a package is potentially hazardous, and what to do with it when they have taken receipt;
- Provide clear instructions to the supplier/delivery company regarding the delivery point;
- Take full account of the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) requirements in respect of storage, use and handling by members of staff and students. This is particularly important where people may come across hazardous substances infrequently, or where they may not have a good understanding of the substance's properties.

Risk assessment must be used to develop a safe system of work.

Responsibility for doing so rests with the management of the School undertaking the activity. Management must actively check that there are effective arrangements in place to control risks in their Schools.

Your safe system of work must take account of the need for information, training, supervision and suitable facilities. If you are unsure, STOP!

Advice can be sought from Health and Safety Services. Colleagues within your School may also have specialist knowledge to help with developing safe procedures.

Steam duct project this summer

The Whiteknights campus steam duct system needs regular inspection to make sure the pipework is in a safe condition and to remove asbestos lagging. This work will get underway in June and take two months.

This is the 2nd phase of a programme that started in 2006. As before, the work will include asbestos removal and re-insulation, the provision of additional access points and new valves on the steam duct system. The project is part of the long term programme to prolong the working life of the system and ensure that any future failure minimises the impact on the central Whiteknights buildings.

Most of the work will be 'invisible', and will be carried out within the enclosures or contractors' compounds. You will see polythene tents being erected to provide access to the steam duct. The contractors may be seen in disposable suits which are colour-coded for non-hazardous work. The works will be supervised by independent analysts to ensure the safety of the contractors and campus users.

Any queries should be directed to Craig Jones, the Project Manager on behalf of the University, x7920.

Health and Safety Services
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Safe use of extension leads

The University has experienced a small fire caused by misuse of an electrical extension lead. Our H&S audits of Schools have also revealed a lack of understanding of when it is safe to use cable reels, and when it is not.

Electricity is everywhere in our homes and at work, and it's a very useful part of our lives. The electrical installation layouts of many of our buildings are often not designed for the number of appliances that are now required. As a result we often resort to using trailing leads and multiple adaptors. But these increase the potential for overload and bad connections that may lead to overheating and cause a fire.

Beware - cable reels can cause a fire

Extension cables should not be tightly coiled whilst in use in case local heating occurs in the reel of cable whilst heavy currents are used; reels must be fully unwound before use unless used at negligible load.



Don't overload sockets

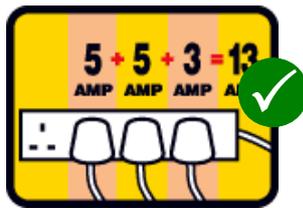
- If too many appliances draw power from one socket it can be overloaded and start overheating.
- It is better to use a bar adaptor on a trailing lead, rather than a block



cuboid adaptor.

- Don't allow the total current used by the appliances plugged into the adaptor to add up to more than 13 amps of current altogether - or 3,000 watts of power. So, for example, you could have two 2 amp appliances and one 5 amp in an adaptor. You should never run more than one appliance that uses

a lot of current, such as a kettle or television, from one socket.



- Check the rating of an adaptor before you plug appliances in.
- Don't plug adaptors into adaptors. Only use one adaptor per socket.

Trips and falls

Don't forget the other risk with extension leads - **trips!** Make sure you route extension leads in a way that reduces the risk of someone tripping over it, and always use a cable cover where there is a chance of people walking on it.

Eyesight tests

We have been told that a small number of high street opticians are charging additional fees for signing DSE user forms, and also for providing an enhanced sight test. The University will not pay for these additional fees.

University DSE users are entitled to an eyesight test on request. The cost of this can be claimed from the University (see Safety Guide 13). To make a claim, University procedures require the DSE user to get a form signed by the optician who carries out the eyesight test. Most opticians will do so free of charge. However we have heard of an administration fee being charged for signing the form. We consider this to be unreasonable, and hence would not support an expenses claim by staff for reimbursement of this part of the fee. Staff should therefore check if their optician is likely to charge an administration fee, over and above the basic cost of the sight test. If the answer is 'yes' staff have the choice of going to another optician.

We have also been asked if the University will pay for additional eye examinations. The University's obligation to provide tests only covers the basic sight test, as defined in the Opticians Act and related legislation.

Noise at work – music and entertainment industries

The Control of Noise at Work Regulations are now in force for the Music and Entertainment sectors. Anyone within the University who organises an event involving live or recorded music must check that the new, reduced noise exposure limits for staff are not exceeded.



The revised noise exposure limit is 87dB. However noise exposure in bars, nightclubs and concerts is normally around 110dB, and 90-95dB for orchestras. This means that event organisers may have to assess and reduce the noise exposure of anyone who is at work.

Exposure to anyone not deemed to be at work e.g. students, is not covered by the Regulations (despite the fact that their long-term hearing may be at risk!). As an employer, the University must:

- Assess employees' noise exposure at 80dB and over.
- Reduce noise if possible rather than just provide hearing protection.
- Provide hearing protection if the noise cannot be reduced to below 80dB.
- Provide information, training and health surveillance.

- Employees have a legal duty to wear the hearing protection provided.

There is a choice of protection that can be provided. This varies from compressible (normal disposable) earplugs for glass collectors and flat response earmuffs for bar staff which block out background noise but allow speech to pass through.

It is also practicable to install noise limiters so that when bands crank up the volume from their amplifiers and exceed a pre-set level, the power is automatically switched off.

The staff most at risk are those regularly work at events where there is loud music, rather than having a one-off exposure. However being exposed to loud noise leads to temporary threshold shifts (i.e. temporary loss of hearing and ringing in the ears, indicating some short-term damage). It would be therefore be good practice to reduce exposure for all staff.

Do you drive on University business?

Driving on University business isn't just limited to people who drive University vehicles on and off campus. It includes academic staff driving their own private vehicles to meetings or conferences, and journeys between our campuses. There are legal obligations on the driver and the University to make sure that road safety legislation and insurance requirements are met.

University vehicles must be maintained in accordance with manufacturer's recommendations, and subject to routine 'before use' and weekly user inspections e.g. tyres, water, brake fluid, lights etc. There must be adequate records held locally to be able to demonstrate that these checks have been carried out. A member of staff must be nominated to ensure that these checks are carried out on department-owned vehicles, and also to ensure that the road tax and MOT certificate is in date.

Where employees use their private cars for business travel, he or she undertakes to ensure that the vehicle:

- Is roadworthy;
- Has a current MOT test certificate;
- Has a valid road tax disc;
- **Is insured for business use;**

and that he or she has a valid driving licence.

A declaration of this is required on the Travel Expenses Claim for mileage before payment can be made.

Increasingly, the expectation is that employers will check to reassure themselves that drivers using their own vehicles are 'legal' - in case of a serious accident, there is the possibility or prosecution or a civil claim against the employer. It is therefore best practice, but not yet University policy, to check drivers' documents annually.

Safe driving – tyre pressure

The only sure way to know that your tyres are going to give you optimum performance is to carry your own foot pump and a separate pressure gauge in the glove box. Don't rely on the gauge on the foot pump itself – it hasn't a hope of being accurate.

Seat belts

You are warned - several police forces are carrying out spot checks on seat belt wearing for back seat passengers.....and are even catching drivers not wearing FRONT seat belts, despite this being generally viewed by the vast majority as being as unacceptable as drink driving.

Incidentally a good tip is to always have the rear belts clipped in their housings. This has the advantage of stopping loose, heavy loads in the boot knocking the rear seats forward in an impact.

Mobile phones

The penalty for using a hand-held phone whilst driving is now £60 and three penalty points on your licence.

A driver can also be prosecuted for using a hands-free device if you are not in proper control of your vehicle when using the device.

As an employer, the University can be prosecuted if it requires employees to make or receive mobile calls while

driving. **With this in mind, callers play an important role in keeping the roads safe. If the person you are speaking to is driving, please terminate the call and arrange to speak to them later.**

Oh what a scorcher!

Barbeques are not allowed on University property unless they are



part of an organised event, for which permission has been given.

This is because of

the fire risk when the grass and shrubbery is dry (which does happen in the British summer, sometimes!) and to protect the greenery from scorching.

If you want to hold an event with a BBQ, please make sure you apply in good time to FMD Maintenance and Grounds Department, using the form available on Health and Safety Services web site.

Top food safety tips

BBQs are also considered high risk in terms of food safety. So follow these top food tips to make sure your guests have an enjoyable time:

- Avoid cross-contamination of food i.e. handling cooked meat with the same equipment that has been used for raw food;
- Make sure that the food is thoroughly cooked - check to make sure that meat juices run clear;
- Don't cook food which has bones in e.g. chicken wings, unless they have been pre-cooked and chilled correctly before going on the BBQ (cooking and properly cooling all food before reheating on a BBQ is a good idea);
- Make sure foods which need to be refrigerated i.e. rice salads, are not left out of the refrigerator for more than two hours;

- Don't drink and cook food – a small amount of alcohol is ok, but if you are the person in charge of cooking you should not be drunk.

Food poisoning does kill! If you want to enjoy yourself and let someone else take responsibility, you can book Commercial Services to provide a BBQ. If your event is for anyone who is not a member of the University, it is a requirement of the University Food Safety Guide that Commercial Services or another approved supplier is used.

More information about social events is available in Safety Guide 33.

Congratulations to FMD

Within the last year, Facilities Management Directorate have made a real commitment to improving the health and safety management skills of managers and supervisors. This is reflected in the number of people who have gained health and safety awards.

FMD manages a wide range of support services, from Grounds to Maintenance to Catering. The risks faced by their staff are many and varied, and require high levels of awareness, training and supervision. The Directorate has therefore supported the following learning activities:

- A British Safety Council course run by H&SS, which led to seven staff being awarded a Level 2 Certificate in 'Supervising Staff Safely'.
- A 'Managing Safely' course accredited by the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH). Eleven staff from Maintenance Services received an IOSH certificate, having undertaken a written exam and a workplace project.
- A demanding National Examination Board in Occupational Safety and Health (NEBOSH) Construction Certificate exam, passed by twelve Project Managers in the Projects, Design and Feasibility (PFD) team.

- An equally demanding NEBOSH General Certificate exam, passed by seven managers in PFD and Residential Services.

To cap it all, Maintenance Services has gained 'CHAS' accredited status. CHAS stands for Contractor Health and Safety Assessment Scheme. The University policy is that all of our contractors must be CHAS registered, to demonstrate competency in health and safety. It seemed only right that Maintenance Services should do so as well. This was a fantastic result because the application was passed first time – 70% of organisations fail in the first instance. CHAS accreditation creates confidence in the H&S standards being adopted at every level in the organisation, including the management, direct labour and office staff (whose DSE assessments are a small but no less significant aspect of H&S).

Asbestos Coordinator

We are delighted to announce that Sean Callaghan has joined Health & Safety Services as the University's Asbestos Co-ordinator.

Sean has worked within the construction industry since joining Turner & Townsend as a Quantity Surveyor in 1977. For the last fifteen years he has been directly involved in work with asbestos, initially as a partner in an asbestos removal business. Prior to joining the University he was working as an asbestos surveyor on his own behalf.

He can be contacted on Extn. 8275 or by email to s.j.callaghan@reading.ac.uk

H&SS web site

The Health and Safety Services web site has been rebranded and restructured.

Please note that our web site is currently accessible from the FMD homepage (see the contact details at the front of this edition). If you experience any problems with the new site, or have suggestions for improvement, please let us know.

PPE suppliers

The University suppliers for Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) now includes BOC. The account manager is Jan Stevenson, tel. 0161 930 6067, email jan.stevenson@boc.com. Further details are on the Procurement web site. Jan will be happy to help you with any queries.

Stop press

Following a recent Environment Agency inspection, Schools using radioactive materials are reminded of the need to comply in full with the details of the University's authorisations. It is essential that high standards are maintained:

- Training programmes, both on and off the job, should be in accordance with written specifications;
- Training records must be kept;
- Staff competency to be assessed;
- Copies of authorisations and e.g. relevant Exemption Notices, to be available to staff, and the implications for their work with radioactive substances fully understood by them;
- All measurements to be in Bq or multiples thereof;
- Regular contamination monitoring to be undertaken in accordance with a written protocol, with records readily available;
- Radioactive materials to be disposed of if there is no justification for keeping them;
- Labs to be maintained in a clean, tidy condition, with surfaces that are easy to clean and decontaminate;
- Keys to stores to be kept secure and only to be accessible to authorised persons.

Thank you to everyone who helped with the inspection. This will be an annual event; it is clear that the EA will expect these observations to be acted upon. If you need any advice or help with this, please contact H&SS.