

## Guidance on arranging a fire drill

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## 1. Scope

This guidance applies to anyone arranging a fire drill in a University of Bristol building.

## 2. Introduction

To comply with the current University Fire Safety Policy, formal fire drills must be carried out every term. Organising a fire drill is quite straightforward but needs a little planning to make it effective. The guidance below describes what to do plus issues that need to be considered as part of arranging and carrying out a fire drill.

## 3. Guidance

### 3.1 Why carry out a fire drill?

To comply with the University Fire Safety Policy and Fire Safety legislation

**NOTE:** False alarm evacuations are not considered replacements for formal fire drills.

### 3.2 What are the benefits?

A formal fire drill acts as a learning experience for all those involved:

Organisers and those with a responsibility for fire safety in a building can assess the effectiveness of their fire safety management procedures including:

- Use and effectiveness of fire wardens plus the control of the evacuation and assembly area;
- Effectiveness of the alarm investigation team;
- Effectiveness of communications with and support from Security and Maintenance;
- Suitability of procedures for evacuating those people who are unable to escape without assistance (personal emergency evacuation plans or PEEPs);
- It is an opportunity to get building occupants familiar with the alternative escape routes from buildings, rather than falling back on the normal way into and out of the building;
- Students and other building occupants will learn the sound of the fire alarm and how to respond to it,
- Students and other building occupants will learn to use alternative escape routes and how to get from the final exits to the fire assembly area.
- Students and other building occupants will learn a good citizen approach, how to look out for friends and colleagues and to raise awareness of those who cannot escape without assistance.

### 3.3 Who arranges a fire drill?

- **In academic and support buildings** it will be the Facilities Manager in their role as Building Fire Coordinator, in coordination with the School or Service Safety Advisers who can advise of the impact on research, experiments, exams etc.
- **In student houses** the drills will be carried out by the Accommodation Manager acting on behalf of the Residential Facilities Manager.
- **Halls fire drills for students** will be arranged by the Residential Facilities Manager and carried out by the Warden or Deputy Warden.
- **Halls fire drills for staff** will be arranged by the Residential Facilities Manager and carried out by the Accommodation Manager.

### 3.4 When should a fire drill take place?

- The first fire drill of the academic year should take place at the start of the autumn term, soon after students arrive, ideally at a time when the building is fully occupied.
- There should be a fire drill every term.

- There is no benefit in holding a fire drill when a building is empty or lightly occupied as it is a learning exercise. You need to know what goes wrong as well as what works well. See 3.3 above regarding drills in Halls.

### 3.5 How to arrange and carry out a fire drill

Having decided when it will be, the Facilities Management organiser needs to:

- Contact the Health and Safety Office on 88780 or [Bristol-safety@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:Bristol-safety@bristol.ac.uk) at least a week in advance so that someone can attend and monitor the drill, if a safety adviser is available to do so.
- Contact Maintenance on 89898 to advise of the drill if there is a need to isolate certain services that would otherwise shut down when the fire alarm sounds. The engineer can reset any system that cannot be isolated. e.g. heating systems, lifts, gas supplies etc.
- On the day of the drill, contact Security on 87848 to advise when the drill will take place. There is no need to contact the Fire Brigade to make them aware. Call Security again once the drill is over, telling them as such and that alarms should now be considered real if they occur.
- Record the drill in Log 1 of the Building Fire Manual.

### 3.6 Other considerations

- Consider setting off the alarm from a manual call point rather than using the alarm panel. Doing it this way means alarm investigation teams can put their training into practice.
- Consider closing off one escape route each drill, especially the main way in and out. This encourages people to use the alternative escape routes.
- Be aware of anyone working or studying in the building who has a mobility issue that would prevent them using the stairs to escape. It may be appropriate to discuss their wishes in advance of the drill: they may want to take part and be assisted out of the building using their agreed means of escape; they may want to go to the refuge and use the communications system but not be taken out of the building. They would wait at the refuge until the drill is over.

If your building is part of a “complex” where it is possible to carry out horizontal evacuation from one building to another, that option could be practiced as part of the fire drill, if the disabled person is in agreement.

Also consider anyone in the building with other forms of disability. For example, some heart conditions could make using the stairs in a potentially stressful evacuation a risky business. Do we want someone to take part if they could become ill as a result? Obviously if there was a real fire they would need to leave the building along with everyone else.

Security officers do not normally take control of a fire drill if they attend. Their role is to help the Building Fire Coordinator and fire wardens. They will only take charge if it is apparent no-one from the building is doing so.

### 3.7 Who can be told in advance?

Unless it is absolutely essential, building occupants, including fire wardens, must **not** be forewarned of a drill. If they are, the drill will not be realistic. Exceptions to this must be those situations where advance planning needs to be done to avoid unnecessary injury, loss of research or animal life. Those buildings where such risks exist should already have suitable procedures in place. Similarly, if there are large numbers of the public in a building, telling fire wardens in advance of the drill will enable them to reassure the visitors and direct them safely out of the building. See 3.6 above regarding evacuation of people with a disability.

### 3.8 What to monitor during the drill:

- A record of the overall evacuation time will be needed for the Fire Risk Assessment so it is important the total evacuation time is noted and put in log 1 of the Building Fire Manual;
- Check that those with specific roles carry them out effectively, e.g. fire wardens, alarm investigators, porters, security officers;
- Does every one go to the assembly area or just mill around outside the front door?
- Are all escape routes used or just the main entrance?
- Are there people in the building who need assistance to evacuate? Did the procedure work if they chose to take part in the drill?
- Have those trained to operate evacuation chairs put the training into practice as part of the drill? Did it work/do they need more practice?

### 3.9 What if people refuse to co-operate and remain in the building?

Except for by prior arrangement and only in exceptional circumstances as outlined above, everyone in a building must leave and go to the assembly area. This is not just University Policy it is a requirement of fire safety legislation. Staff or students who deliberately fail to comply without a valid reason can expect to be subjected to the University disciplinary procedure.

Feel free to contact the Fire Safety Adviser if you want advice regarding fire drills.

Richard Norris

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