

## **Fire Alarms- Use of buildings when they are out of service**

### Document control information

Published document name:	no-alarm-gn.pdf
Date issued:	December 2011
Version:	2.0
Previous review dates:	October 2010
Next review date:	December 2012
Related documents:	Fire Safety Policy
Governing policy:	Fire Safety Policy
Guidance to policy:	n/a
Legislation or related information:	Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005
Document owner:	Richard Norris
Document approved by:	Director of Health and Safety
Lead contact:	Richard Norris

## Contents

1. Scope .....	2
2. Introduction .....	2
3. Immediate actions required.....	2
4. Guidance.....	3
4.1 Making a decision on building occupancy .....	3
4.2 Control measures to be implemented.....	4
4.3 System fully restored .....	5

### 1. Scope

This guidance is to help make decisions on the actions which should be taken following a building's fire alarm system being out of service.

Buildings without a fire alarm system fitted are not covered by this guidance.

### 2. Introduction

It is essential that all occupants of a building can quickly be alerted should a fire occur. This is to ensure all building occupants can evacuate the building effectively and that the University complies with fire safety legislation. Any delay in building users being alerted to a fire (for example due to a fire alarm failure) could lead to the escape from a building taking longer and a risk of serious injury or death.

A building's alarm system may be out of service for a range of reasons including planned maintenance or faults/failures. The issue may affect only a section of a building, just the smoke detectors or call points throughout the whole building. A complete failure of a building's fire alarm system can also occur however this is rare.

### 3. Immediate actions required

These actions must be taken in the event of an alarm failure:

- Report the alarm failure to the Maintenance helpdesk on ext 89898 and report as **urgent**. Out of hours contact Security on ext 87848 who will contact Maintenance shift.
- Notify the Fire Safety Adviser as soon as possible once Maintenance or Security has been contacted.

## 4. Guidance

Each case where the alarm system is out of service will be different but a risk assessment must be carried out to inform the decision whether to continue to occupy the building.

### 4.1 Making a decision on building occupancy

In liaison with Estates Operations, the Health and Safety Office and major building occupiers, the Facilities Manager is responsible for making the decision on closure/occupancy of the building for the duration of the alarm being out of service.

Possible options include:-

1. Completely close the building to all occupants until it can be safely reoccupied.
2. Partially use or occupy the building with restrictions in place to limit use of certain areas or activities.
3. Keep the building in full use with appropriate precautions in place to ensure risks to building occupants are adequately controlled.

If partial or full use of the building is chosen (2 or 3 above) then the full range of circumstances affecting the building must be taken into consideration. These include:

- The extent and nature of the alarm system failure e.g. total failure, a particular area of the building, call point failure or detector failure.
- How long it will take to restore the system to full operation.
- What other suitable methods of detecting fire and raising the alarm are available.
- Will evacuation in the event of a fire being discovered be effective
- The building's use and the activities carried out within the building examples of which are:-
  - Use of naked flames
  - Use as sleeping accommodation
  - Activities and or experiments involving chemical reactions
  - Public events
  - Building opening hours
  - Noisy activities which could prevent building users being aware of the need to evacuate
- The number of people at risk in the building this should include students, staff, visitors, contractors or event attendees. You should also consider lone working.
- Individuals capabilities for example building users with disabilities

- The size and complexity of the building whether it is single or multi storey and may have large and complex layouts.

## 4.2 Control measures to be implemented

To make a building safe whilst the fire alarm is out of service the following measures may need to be taken.

1. **Fire search inspections of the affected area** at an appropriate frequency throughout the duration of the alarm failure, covering the whole of the affected area but in particular unoccupied areas and higher risk areas.
  - More than one search team may be required depending on the size/complexity of the building and length of time taken to complete a search.
  - Cover may need to be provided for individuals involved in the search to take rest breaks.
  - Security may be able to provide assistance out of hours.
  - Search teams must be equipped with a suitable means of raising the alarm or attracting people's attention e.g. whistles, bells, 2 way radios, klaxons or air horns.
  - Individuals carrying out the inspections should be trained in using fire extinguishers.
  - Remember that keys may be needed to gain entry to some areas or rooms
2. **Make building users aware of the issues and temporary procedures** this will include providing information on what to do if a fire is discovered, how to raise alarm and the restrictions that are in place and warning notices around the building.
3. **Suspend non-essential activities likely to lead to a fire developing** until the alarm system is restored. Examples of this could be to suspend the use of a naked flame or experiments that may lead to a fire starting. If it is absolutely essential that an activity takes place which could lead to a fire, guidance should be obtained from the Health and Safety Office. The activity must be individually risk assessed and only allowed to continue if suitable additional controls are in place.
4. **Restricted public and student access** during the failure
5. **Restricted overnight running of experiments** to only essential suitably risk assessed and supervised activities and equipment.
6. **Lone working**, especially out of hours or overnight must be reviewed and only permitted if absolutely necessary and if suitable control measures are put in place.
7. **All non essential electrical items** should be turned off when not in use.

### 4.3 System fully restored

Once the fire alarm system has been fully restored to full service, normal operations within the building can resume. The Facilities Manager in his/her role of Building Fire Co-ordinator must carry out a non-scheduled review of the fire risk assessment and Building Fire Manual and provide electronic copies of these to the Fire Safety Adviser.