

Process for making temporary changes to a building's fire precautions

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1. Introduction

Where a work process risk assessment identifies that the work is likely to affect the fire alarm system or will require a change to the building fire precautions, suitable control measures need to be adopted to reduce risks to staff, students or anyone else affected.

Where control measures would involve a temporary isolation of automatic fire detection equipment, including "bagging-off" of individual detector heads, the Estates Operations Permit to Work (PtW) system must be used to enable official methods of alarm isolation to be put in place. Automatic fire detectors must not be isolated by using any other means.

Work processes that require longer-term or permanent changes to the fire alarm system will need to be dealt with in another way. Please see paragraph four for more information.

2. The Permit to Work System (PtW)

Temporary alterations to a small section of a fire alarm system must only be by use of the current Estates Operations Permit to Work (PtW) procedure. The procedure covers many different forms of high risk activity but temporary isolation of part of a

fire alarm system is covered by an "isolation" permit. Methods of local alarm isolation include: reprogramming the alarm system to electronically isolate individual detector heads; "bagging-off" individual detector heads; changing the detectors from smoke to heat (and associated system reprogramming); temporary removal of individual detector heads (and associated system reprogramming).

There should be sufficient prior notice (at least ten working days) to allow the PtW process to be put into effect. Under very exceptional circumstances an Authorised Person (AP) can be allocated to the PtW and a decision made within a shorter period of time.

Details on the PtW system can be found at

<http://www.bris.ac.uk/Depts/Bursar/BuildingServices/permit/permitwork.htm>.

Follow links from the above to go to the relevant paperwork or information.

3. Risk Assessment identifies the need for a temporary, local fire alarm isolation

When the risk assessment identifies the need for a temporary, local isolation of the fire alarm, for example one or two detectors in the vicinity of some work that will raise dust, the following steps must be taken:

The risk assessment must be completed and passed to the Facilities Manager in their role as Building Fire Coordinator (FM/BFC) who will assess the impact on the building fire alarm system;

The originator of the risk assessment will apply for a permit to work via the existing channels - Estates Services PtW process (see above).

The relevant AP will assess the impact of the works and authorise the permit as appropriate. The permit is retained by the person carrying out the work activity and the associated daily sign-off sheet will be placed in the red fire document box with the building Fire Risk Assessment. It must be signed daily by the person doing the work for the duration of the temporary isolation. The FM/BFC will place the work process risk assessment with the building Fire Risk Assessment and the daily permit sign-off sheet, keeping it there for the duration of the temporary isolation.

On completion of the work the originator of the PtW will sign-off the permit to work and return it, and the daily sign-off sheet, to the Authorised Person to arrange cancellation of the permit. The person carrying out the work activity can remove the orange bags used to carry out the temporary isolation as it is not something an engineer is needed for. The person carrying out the work must finally advise the FM/BFC who will remove the work process risk assessment from the FRA.

4. Risk Assessment identifies the need for a permanent or long term change to the building fire strategy

When the risk assessment identifies that the works will significantly change fire safety measures in the building, e.g. #1 a permanent work process is to be introduced that will continually or regularly generate steam that would set off the fire alarm, or e.g. #2 room alterations change the layouts of escape routes on a floor that would involve alterations to the fire alarm system and emergency lighting system, these changes represent a potential change to the fire strategy within the building.

Where this is the case, consultation between all interested parties must occur before any changes occur. These parties must include Estates Operations Engineers, and or Surveyors, other building users (especially if the areas affected are used by more than one department), the Facilities Manager in their role as Building Fire Coordinator, the Health and Safety Office. This list is not intended to be exhaustive.

Once approval and agreement has been reached, possibly with involvement of outside agencies e.g. Building Control, the FM/BFC must carry out a formal review of the building Fire Risk Assessment and the updated FRA must be put in the Building Fire Manual to replace the existing document.

5. Departmental liaison with Building Fire Coordinator

The Facilities Manager will also be the Building Fire Coordinator (FM/BFC). This person will take ownership of the building's fire documents and ensure the information relating to the common areas is included and accurate. However, the FM/BFC cannot know the exact detail of how school or departmental activities are carried out or the hazards and risks involved. It is therefore essential that the Head of School or Head of Service nominates' someone whose role it will be to liaise with the FM/BFC to complete the fire documents.

It is absolutely essential that this person contacts the FM/BFC when new departmental work is planned and it is known there could be an effect on the fire safety of people using the building.

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Appendix 1: Flowchart to help identify if the Permit to Work process is needed

