

FIRE DRILLS IN SCHOOLS

An overview of how schools should carry out a fire drill.

It is the responsibility of the head teacher and governing body of the premises to ensure that fire evacuation drills are carried out.

The dangers which may threaten children and staff if a fire breaks out depends on many different factors. Consequently, it is not possible to construct a model procedure for action in the event of fire which would be suitable for use in all premises.

Each fire routine must be based upon a simple, efficient procedure which is specifically designed for the premises in which it has to operate. It is therefore important that the following points must be given prime consideration.

The purpose of the fire drill

Fire drills are intended to ensure, by means of training and rehearsal, that:

- people who may be in danger act in a calm and orderly manner
- those with responsibilities carry out their tasks to ensure the safety of all concerned
- escape routes are used in accordance with a predetermined and practised plan
- evacuation of the building is achieved in a speedy and orderly manner
- people will react rationally when confronted with a fire or other emergency at school or elsewhere.

The occupancy of the premises

Consideration must be given to the age of the pupils attending the school and whether there are any children with special needs.

Frequency of fire evacuation drills

Fire evacuation drills should be held at least once per term, preferably at the start of each term and when there is a turnover of staff or new pupils.

Notices and signs

Each fire alarm point should, where necessary, be clearly indicated 'Fire Alarm' in accordance with the health and safety (safety signs and signals) regulations followed by the appropriate operating instructions.

A notice should be displayed adjacent to the telephone or switchboard giving clear instructions for calling the fire service in the event of fire.

Notices should be displayed for staff detailing their actions in an emergency in visible positions e.g. staff room.

Firefighting

Any attempt to fight the fire must always be secondary to life safety. Circumstances will clearly dictate whether firefighting should be attempted. Any attempt to fight the fire must be

based upon the type and degree of training received in the use of firefighting equipment available on the premises.

Regular fire drills will ensure that the evacuation procedure fulfils its aim satisfactorily and will highlight any area which may need to be reviewed.

Multi-building sites

Many schools have more than one building on site. It is not necessary for the fire alarm systems within these buildings to be linked together.

In the event of an alarm, a procedure should be established whereby contact is made with the other buildings on site either by telephone or by a designated person. Once contact has been made, it will be usual procedure to evacuate all buildings (by operating the fire alarm, tannoy message or personally with each class).

The aim of evacuating all buildings is to attempt to carry out a roll call. Operating procedures within some schools (mainly middle and high schools) may make it virtually impossible to say with any degree of certainty that "all persons are accounted for." In these cases, management may decide to operate a 'floor warden' scheme. This delegates responsibility to members of staff to quickly search each floor (all rooms, including toilets) and to report to the designated person that their floor is clear. Where this procedure is in operation it is not necessary to evacuate all buildings, but this may be at the discretion of the school management.