



FURNITURE AND EQUIPMENT ON FIRE ESCAPE ROUTES

GUIDANCE

Name of Policy:	Guidance on Furniture and Equipment on fire escape routes
Purpose of the Policy:	To ensure compliance with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 with respect to fire escape routes.
Policy Applies to:	All Staffordshire University staff and students.
Approved by:	Health & Safety Committee
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Staffordshire University's commitment to equality and diversity means that this policy has been screened in relation to the use of gender neutral language, jargon free plain English, recognition of the needs of disabled people, promotion of the positive duty in relation to race and disability and avoidance of stereotypes. This policy is available in alternative formats on request.

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1.0 Introduction

This guidance note gives advice on how to ensure compliance with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 with respect to fire escape routes.

This legislation requires the University to ensure that corridors and stairwells that form part of escape routes should be kept clear and hazard free at all times. Items that may be a source of fuel or pose an ignition threat should not normally be located on any corridor or stairwell that will be used as an escape route.

The main sources of ignition and fuel currently found on escape routes are photocopiers, seating, notice boards, student pigeon holes, waste materials and art work.

2.0 Protected Stairwells

A protected stairwell is a stair that is closed from the accommodation parts of the building on every floor. The purpose of this is to provide two smoke doors between the stairwell and the fire so that people in the stairwell evacuating the building are protected from the fire and smoke so that smoke is prevented from spreading through the building.

It is important that these areas are especially free of anything that can burn as it is part of the function of a protected route to be as safe as possible in all fire cases. Therefore no posters, notices, furniture or storage of materials can be accepted in these areas. Further guidance on this is available from the Health and Safety Unit.

3.0 Corridors

Corridors need to be kept unobstructed at all times to avoid tripping and collision risks so as not to hinder passage in the event of an emergency evacuation. Corridors may not be regarded as an extension to the Faculty or Service's assigned accommodation that adjoins it.

4.0 Furniture and Equipment

There is a two-fold problem with furniture and equipment in fire escape routes. Firstly, it may represent an obstruction to egress from the building in the event of a fire and secondly it may present a fire risk by either being the source of ignition or being the fuel thus sustaining a fire.

4.1. Equipment

Equipment with the potential to cause fire:

For equipment that may cause a fire (i.e. electrical or uses flammable solvents, etc.), this is generally prohibited from corridors and corridor spaces. It may only be used in rooms separate from the corridor by a door or in areas that are specifically defined as “dual use”. The designation is made by the Health and Safety Unit, in consultation with the local Fire Service and departments may not decide that an area is to be “dual use” without prior permission from the Health and Safety Unit.

Examples of this type of equipment include:

- Photocopiers, Printers, Computers, Televisions
- Drinks and Snack Machines
- Freezers and Refrigerators

Examples of equipment that is not included in this list include:

- Telephones, Battery (dry cell) powered devices.

For equipment that does not pose a risk of starting fires, the following guidance for furniture may be used.

4.2. Furniture

4.2.1. Obstruction

The problem with most furniture is that it is large and will obstruct routes of egress if it is not carefully located. No furniture may be placed in any corridor if it narrows the remaining width of the corridor to less than that of the widest egress doors.

In addition to the above any furniture that is placed in corridors where it may be knocked over and cause a risk should be secured to the floor or wall such that it is not vulnerable to being knocked over. This also applies to “Dual Purpose” areas.

Redundant furniture must not be stored in corridors whilst awaiting disposal by campus staff, such furniture must be retained in offices until it can be disposed of in a safe manner.

4.2.2. Special Fire Risks

The only furniture permitted in corridors incorporating foam (e.g. padded seats) will have to bear the mark showing that it has passed the flame test. Even if the furniture passed but no longer bears the mark it may not be placed into a corridor.

As all furniture represents fuel for the fire and it is necessary to minimise the amount of fuel available in corridors the amount of furniture must also be limited. This means that chairs, tables, etc. can only be placed in corridors where there is a proven need for this facility, and then furniture should be selected that represents a low fire risk.

In order to minimise the amount of fuel present the preferred furniture items are made of metals, followed by solid woods, then laminated woods then finally plastics and chipboards. This is because plastics will burn very vigorously once melted – whilst woods burn more slowly and give off less harmful fumes.

In the case of lockers, bookcases and filing cabinets, cupboards, tables and shelves, there are also considerations of what is kept in/on the furniture. There is specific guidance on each of the above types of furniture, and the matters covered should be considered when comparing controls of other types of furniture intended to be placed in corridors.

4.3. Specific Items

4.3.1. Lockers

Departments wishing to place lockers in corridors will need to consult with the Health and Safety Unit on this matter in advance.

Ideally lockers should have sloping tops fitted to prevent the use of the locker tops for additional storage, otherwise the locker tops should be kept clear.

The lockers must be made of steel (or at least solid wood) and have doors that lock or secure closed. Mesh cages and lockers with excessively large ventilation grilles will not be acceptable in corridors. The types of lockers often used for drying rooms will fall into the 'unacceptable' category as they have very large air circulation vents to aid drying.

The lockers will require to be fastened together or secured to the wall so as to provide a high degree of stability. Lockers must not be loose as they then have the potential to fall and block the corridor.

The contents of lockers should be restricted. In particular, flammable substances are not permitted to be kept in lockers in corridors. In all cases the locker doors should be kept locked/closed.

Permitted contents of lockers in corridors:

- Lab Coats/Outdoor protective clothing
- Personal effects of Staff/Students whilst they are in the University Building
- Books and papers not permitted in laboratories

Prohibited contents of lockers in corridors:

- Flammable, highly flammable, or otherwise high risk liquids or gases
- Compressed gas cylinders
- Chemicals, Samples, Biological agents or other such materials

In all cases the location of Lockers will be restricted to those corridors where there is automatic fire detection (at least two detector heads present) and where risk assessment indicates that it is otherwise reasonable.

4.3.2. Bookcases and Filing Cabinets

THESE CANNOT BE ACCEPTED IN CORRIDORS

4.3.3. Pigeon holes

These are frequently provided for staff and student post. Wherever possible these should not be in corridors in buildings, in any case no wire cage type pigeon holes are to be in corridors. The preference is for steel pigeon holes over wooden ones.

Any pigeon holes that are to remain in corridors must be in safe locations – i.e. in corridors with fire detection (preferably two or more detector heads present in that part of the corridor) and they must be managed to prevent the build-up of post, for example by removal of post for colleagues who are away from the department.

The provision of new pigeon holes must be subject to assessment in accordance with the requirements above.

4.3.4. Display Materials and Decorations

Displays are often located in corridors and in entrance foyers, and generally comprise materials such as paper, cardboard and plastic, which provides a

means for the rapid spread of fire. You should evaluate what materials could ignite first and what would cause the fire to develop and spread, and assess how materials used in temporary or permanent displays would interact with surface linings and position them accordingly. To reduce the risk of fire spread, you should consider the following:

- Avoid the use of displays in corridors and foyers
- Minimise the size and number of display areas to discrete, separated areas (e.g. along a corridor)
- Treat displays with proprietary flame-retardant sprays
- The use of display cabinets
- Keep displays away from light fittings and heaters
- Keep displays away from ceiling voids which may lack fire barriers; and
- Ensure that there are no ignition sources in the vicinity

4.3.5. Dual Use

The phrase “Dual Use” has been used in this guidance, and is meant to indicate both Fire Egress and Accommodation uses for the part of the building. Two examples are given below.

- A room which forms an alternative egress route from a corridor to the outside. In this case the virtual corridor through the room will need to be maintained as an unobstructed route in the same way as the corridor outside is kept clear of obstructions. However this is still a room so the other restrictions do not apply.
- A corridor that is sufficiently wide to accommodate a limited number of chairs to use as a waiting area outside an office. Here the primary function is as a corridor but the dual use for accommodation is permitted, although the other restrictions of being a corridor will still apply.

5.0 Notice Boards

Wall mounted notice boards, display boards and bulletin boards are used throughout the University as an essential and convenient way of communicating information to staff and students. However, open notice boards which have substantial amounts of paper attached are vulnerable to arson and a fire on a notice board can facilitate the rapid spread of flames and the production of a significant amount of smoke. There have been two instances of Notice boards being set on fire at Staffordshire

University; therefore the following guidance must be followed when erecting notice boards.

5.1. Types of Notice Boards

Notice boards are given BS476 Part 7 – surface spread of flame rating.

Class O Notice boards which comply with 'Class O' requirements are glazed notice boards with aluminium frame, fire resistant toughened glass doors and 'Class O' core material with fire resisting covering.

Class 1 Open type boards with fire resistant material covering.

5.2. Corridors with an alternative means of escape (not dead ends)

Open notice boards are allowed in corridors with escape in two directions but must meet the following criteria:

- (i) The corridor has smoke detection or other sensing device in the section where the notice board is to be fixed.
- (ii) The boards are located away from radiators/heaters.
- (iii) Open notice boards **must** be restricted to one side of the corridor. If 'Class O' boards are used they may be used on both sides of a corridor. Notice boards may be on both sides of a corridor **only** where all on one side are 'Class O'.
- (iv) Notice boards must meet Class '1' requirements with fire material covering providing that the surface area of the 'Class 1' material does not exceed 20% of the total ceiling and wall surface area of the corridor. The remaining area must be 'Class O'.

In applying the 20% surface area factor, any poster, display board or similar items fixed to the wall or ceiling surfaces shall be included in the calculation as 'Class 1' items.

- (v) The board must be suitably managed. The name and email address of the person responsible for the board must be displayed on each board.
 - Notices must be pinned down at all four corners and **must not** extend beyond the confines of the board.
 - Notices of a permanent nature should be laminated.

- Untidy boards tend not to get read so remove old material regularly.
- Notice boards in corridors must not be used for dispensing leaflets.

5.3. Temporary Signs or Notices

Temporary signs and notices to aid new students to navigate, persons to get to conferences, etc. can be placed on pillars and walls in corridors, but not in stairwells, providing this is done as sparingly as possible. Such notices must include the contact details of the person responsible for the notices and on completion of the event they must be removed as soon as possible. All other unauthorised notices and any notices without contact details will be removed immediately.

6.0 Waste Materials

Waste materials such as packaging, paper recycling bags, general waste bags must **NOT** be stored in corridors whilst awaiting collection.