



**GREATER
MANCHESTER**
FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

COVID-19 FIRE SAFETY ADVICE:

INFORMATION FOR SCHOOLS

Introduction

This information sheet has been produced by Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service (GMFRS), to assist schools in Greater Manchester in understanding their fire safety responsibilities and ensure that the Fire Safety Order is being complied with as schools plan to reopen to all pupils. It sets out the key duties under the Fire Safety Order and provides advice on how you can ensure that your school is meeting its obligations and take steps to ensure safety in the event of a fire.

The Fire Safety Order imposes duties on the 'responsible person'. In schools, this will generally be the employer, but any staff who have specific responsibilities in relation to fire safety are also covered by the Fire Safety Order.

Fire Risk Assessment

Every school is required by law to have a suitable and sufficient fire risk assessment. This helps identify the arrangements you need to have in place to make sure the risk of fire is minimised and if a fire does occur, no one in the school is injured.

Your fire risk assessment should cover:

- Risk of fire and ignition sources
- Fire detection & alarms
- Firefighting equipment
- Emergency lighting
- Emergency procedures and in particular evacuation of the school
- Maintenance
- Staff training

Your fire risk assessment should be reviewed regularly and if you have made any changes to the building, or the way the building is used, you should review the fire risk

assessment. If you have not made any changes, it is good practice to ensure that the fire risk assessment is reviewed at least once a year. Your fire risk assessment should be reviewed in conjunction with your Covid-19 Risk Assessment.

Where a fire risk assessment is reviewed and changes are necessary to the preventative and protective measures already in place, these should be made and the changes documented and communicated to people in the school who need to know about the changes.

Fire Alarms

The purpose of a fire alarm is to detect a fire and warn people so they can evacuate. Most schools will have an automatic fire alarm system and this must be appropriate for the size and layout of the school. This should normally comply British Standard (BS) 5839: Part 1. Your fire risk assessment should have determined the type of system required.

To make sure that your fire alarm system works, it should be tested and maintained on a regular basis. The recommended frequency for testing and maintenance are set out in BS 5839: Part 1 as follows:

- Daily checks – visual check of control panel for faults etc.
- Weekly test – all types of fire alarm systems should be tested once a week. It is best practice to do this at the same time each week. For systems that include manual call points, testing one of these will ensure the link to the fire panel is working and the alarm would be raised if it were activated. It is recommended that a different manual call point be tested each week
- Periodic inspection and test by a competent person – six-monthly or annual servicing by a competent fire alarm engineer should be carried out to ensure the system is working as it should
- Non-routine test – following a fire, ensure an inspection and test of the fire alarm system to ensure it is still working as it should.

It is recommended that all tests, and any resulting maintenance of the system, should be recorded in a logbook. This is a way of documenting your compliance with the Fire Safety Order and helps with the ongoing management of fire safety arrangements.

If an Alarm Receiving Centre or Fire Alarm Monitoring Organisation monitors your fire alarm, you should contact them to make sure they have up to date information about the school and who to contact outside of school opening hours. GMFRS does not respond to automatic fire alarms in schools between 08:00 – 19:00 unless the caller is able to confirm there is a fire. If your alarm goes off outside of these hours, GMFRS will attend but you will need to ensure that a keyholder can also attend the school within 20 minutes.

Firefighting Equipment

Your fire risk assessment will determine the need for any firefighting equipment in the school.

The most common firefighting equipment found in schools is fire extinguishers. The number and types of fire extinguisher you have should be determined by your fire risk assessment. You need to ensure that staff are trained to use the fire extinguishers and this should form part of regular fire safety training.

You need to ensure that fire extinguishers are serviced regularly. This will normally be every 12 months and should be carried out by a competent person.

Between services, the fire extinguishers should be regularly inspected to ensure that:

- The fire extinguisher has pressure - by looking at the gauge on the fire extinguisher and ensuring it is in the green or white zone and has not fallen into the red zone
- The fire extinguisher has been serviced – check the service record on the fire extinguisher, or testing records, to ensure it has been tested by a competent person in the last 12 months
- There is no damage – check the fire extinguisher for signs of rust, leaks, the safety pin is in place and there is no evidence of tampering
- It is in the right place – check that the fire extinguisher has not been moved and that signage to show the fire extinguisher location is in place

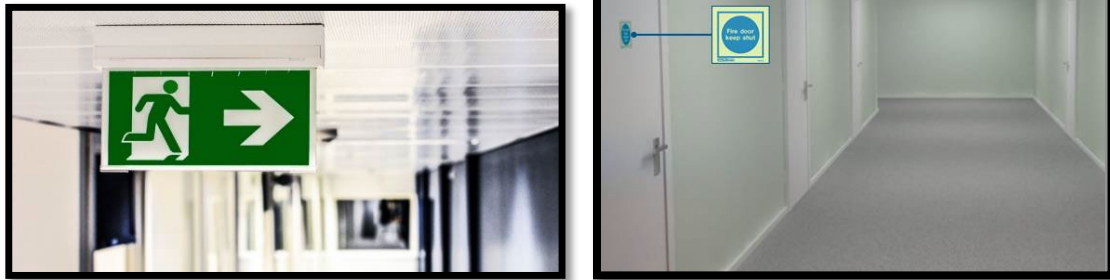
It is recommended that all tests, and any resulting maintenance of the fire extinguishers, should be recorded in a logbook. This is a way of documenting your compliance with the Fire Safety Order and helps with the ongoing management of fire safety arrangements.

Emergency Routes and Exits

All escape routes should lead to a fire exit that should be capable of being easily and immediately openable and, in most cases, should open in the direction of escape. This exit may be a usual entrance / exit from the building or a specific emergency exit. Emergency exits should be clearly signed so that if the usual entrance / exit is not available, other escape routes can quickly be located.

Fire exits may be locked when the school is not occupied but must be available for use when anyone is occupying the school. Emergency routes and exits must be kept clear and available at all times, with no obstructions narrowing or preventing routes and exits from being used.

Wherever you are in the school, you should be able to see at least one sign, documenting your fire exit or escape route. These should be positioned above doors and at any change in direction or change of level. All staff and pupils should know where your fire assembly points are, and this information must be provided to any visitors



Where any failure in power would leave an emergency route or exit unlit, emergency lighting must be used. Your fire risk assessment will determine whether emergency lighting is required or not. The emergency lighting may not be as bright as the usual lighting, but if the power fails, will provide enough lighting so people can see the exit route and escape safely. Emergency lighting should illuminate:

- Escape routes
- Fire exits
- Exit signs
- Safety equipment (i.e. firefighting equipment, first aid points)

To make sure that your emergency lighting system works it should be tested and maintained on a regular basis. The recommended frequency for testing and maintenance are as follows:

- Daily checks – visual check of central controls and indication lights on emergency lighting units
- Monthly test – a function test, usually done by inserting a “fishtail” key, to ensure all emergency lamps illuminate
- Periodic inspection and test by a competent person – annual full discharge test by a competent engineer should be carried out to ensure the system is working, as it should
- Non-routine test – following a fire, ensure an inspection and test of the emergency lighting system to ensure it is still working as it should

It is recommended that all tests and services plus any resulting maintenance of the system, should be recorded in a logbook. This is a way of documenting your compliance with the Fire Safety Order.

Fire Doors

Fire doors are vital to prevent the spread of fire and smoke should a fire occur in your school. You should have systems in place to ensure fire doors are inspected and properly maintained. A fire door found to be damaged or defective should be immediately repaired or replaced.

Fire doors should be inspected on a regular basis. The following points should be considered when an inspection is carried out on a fire door:

- self-closing devices must ensure that fire doors close completely into their rebate
- When the fire door is in the closed position, there must not be any large gaps (larger than 3mm), that would allow the passage of smoke and flame. Some fire doors have intumescent strips and cold smoke seals to prevent the passage of smoke. These should be checked for damage, along with the door
- Fire doors should be marked with an appropriate sign for example “Fire Door Keep Shut” or “Fire Door Keep Locked Shut”. This will normally be a blue circular sign.

Fire doors should never be wedged open and the propping, or wedging open, of fire doors to minimise the touching of door handles is dangerous. If you have fire doors in your school, they are there to protect people within the building from fire and smoke spread. Leaving them open puts staff, pupils and visitors at risk. Automatic release systems that work off the sound of the fire alarm can be added to doors. This allows fire doors to be in the open position, but then close to prevent the spread of fire and smoke should a fire occur.

Evacuation Arrangements and Drills

Many schools have introduced one-way systems and other changes within circulation spaces to help prevent the spread of Covid-19. These changes should not impede an evacuation, should a fire occur. It is important that staff and pupils understand that if the fire alarm sounds, they should evacuate the building via the closest exit without delay.

If you have people who do not ordinarily work in the school present to support testing of pupils as they return to school you must ensure that they are provided with information about the evacuation arrangements and what to do in the event of a fire.

Training

The Fire Safety Order requires employers to ensure that their staff are provided with adequate fire safety training when they are first employed and on a periodic basis.

The training provided should be appropriate to the risks identified in your fire risk assessment and may vary for different staff members based on their role.

It is recommended that if you have people working in the school who are not ordinarily employed by the school you ensure that they are provided with basic training about the fire safety arrangements in the school and what to do in the event of a fire.

The type of training should be based on the particular features of the school and should:

- Consider the findings of the fire risk assessment
- Explain the emergency procedures
- Consider the work activities and explain the duties and responsibilities of staff
- Take place during normal working hours and be repeated at frequent intervals
- Be simple and easy to understand by staff and other people who may be present
- Be tested by fire drills (i.e. block a usual exit so that employees have to identify and use an exit they are less familiar with)

Fire Hydrants

Fire hydrants are used by Fire and Rescue Services to provide a water supply in the vicinity of a fire. GMFRS have approximately 32,000 fire hydrants throughout Greater Manchester. It is our responsibility to ensure that these fire hydrants remain serviceable and available for use in the event of fire.



If you have a fire, it is vital that firefighters can access water quickly. Obstruction of fire hydrants, which is often caused by inconsiderate parking, can delay firefighting and result in unnecessary fire damage to the school. You should ensure that fire hydrants are clear for GMFRS to use at all times.

How to Contact Us

If you would like any further information or advice on complying with the Fire Safety Order, please do not hesitate to contact us at firesafetyadmin@manchesterfire.gov.uk

Useful Information and Links

Information and advice on carrying out a fire risk assessment, as well as other Health and Safety advice, is available via the Home Office at:

www.gov.uk/guidance/good-estate-management-for-schools/health-and-safety

The National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) has produced guidance on choosing a fire risk assessor. If you are arranging for someone else to carry out or review your fire risk assessment, you may also want to check that they have experience of undertaking fire risk assessments in schools.

Guidance can be found online at:

www.nationalfirechiefs.org.uk/Finding-fire-risk-assessor

It is often simple to take action to stop fires starting or prevent the spread of fire. There is a lot of useful information and advice available free of charge on the HM Government website:

www.gov.uk and www.gov.uk/government/collections/fire-safety-law-and-guidance-documents-for-business

The National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) has produced advice on managing fire safety during the Coronavirus Pandemic. This can be found online at:

www.nationalfirechiefs.org.uk/COVID-19

Further information can be found at:

www.manchesterfire.gov.uk/staying-safe/what-we-do/business-fire-safety-covid-19/