

Arranging a fire drill



1. Introduction

Fire drills are required in University buildings to comply with fire safety law and with the University fire safety policy. In line with government guidance for places of education, fire drills at the University should occur every term and be recorded in the building's fire manuals logs for fire brigade inspection.

2. Overview

A way of testing fire safety management arrangements in a building, fire drills are considered training exercises for all involved. They help building users learn and remember alternative escape routes and allow fire wardens to practice their evacuation role. Shortcomings in fire safety arrangements can be identified and rectified.

Fire drills are planned events, but advance warning should not normally be given to building users. This ensures they react normally when the fire alarm sounds and are not unnaturally prepared. False fire alarm activations and evacuations do not count as fire drills as they are unplanned.

Everyone in a building must comply with fire drills, including staff, students, visitors, and contractors.

3. Who arranges fire drills?

In all University buildings that have fire drills, these are arranged by the building Facilities Manager. In student residential accommodation, the drills are arranged by the Residential Facilities Manager or by the Residential FM Coordinator.

In all cases, the University Fire Safety Adviser should be made aware of forthcoming fire drills so, where possible, a member of the Safety and Health Services team can attend the fire drill to monitor the event.

4. Arranging a fire drill in practice

The Facilities Manager will know what work, research or teaching is taking place within the building and will work with relevant people to plan the drill date and time so it will not disrupt work that is critical.

Once the date and time is agreed, the Facilities Manager will contact the Fire Safety Adviser to alert Safety and Health Services of these plans and ensure that someone can attend the drill to monitor events.

On the planned fire drill date, the Facilities Manager will:

- call Security (x87848) so they know a planned fire drill is about to take place,
- set off the fire alarm (see below for suggestions),
- allow fire wardens or the chief fire warden, fire marshal or officer in charge to run the fire drill as they normally would,
- time how long it takes for everyone to leave and go to the fire assembly point.

Once the drill is over:

- call Security again to advise the drill is over and advise them that all future fire alarms from the building should be considered real events, not drills,
- record the drill in Log 1 of the building fire manual.

Once people return to the building:

- encourage fire wardens to meet at the front of the building to hold a brief discussion on how the drill worked,
- identify any problems to be addressed.

5. Other considerations

Consider setting off the alarm from a manual call point rather than using the alarm panel. Doing it this way means alarm investigation teams can put their training into practice.

Consider closing off one escape route during each drill, especially the main way in and out. This encourages people to use the alternative escape routes.

Be aware of anyone working or studying in the building who has a mobility issue that would prevent them using the stairs to escape. It may be appropriate to discuss their wishes in advance of the drill: they may want to take part and be assisted out of the building using their agreed means of escape (PEEP); they may want to go to the refuge and use the communications system but not be taken out of the building. They would wait at the refuge until the drill is over.

If your building is part of a complex, where it is possible to carry out horizontal evacuation from one building to another, that option could be practiced as part of the fire drill if the disabled person agrees.

Also consider anyone in the building with other forms of disability. For example, some heart conditions could make using the stairs in a potentially stressful evacuation risky. Do we want someone to take part if they could become ill as a result? In a real fire, they would need to leave the building along with everyone else.

Security officers do not normally take control of a fire drill if they attend. Their role is to help the building users and fire wardens. They will only take charge if it is apparent no-one from the building is doing so.

6. Who can be given advance warning of a fire drill?

Unless it is absolutely essential, building occupants, including fire wardens, must not be forewarned of a drill. If they are, the drill will not be realistic.

Exceptions to this must be those situations where advance planning needs to be done to avoid unnecessary injury, loss of research or animal life. Those buildings where such risks exist should already have suitable procedures in place. Similarly, if there are large numbers of the public in a building, telling fire wardens in advance of the drill will enable them to reassure the visitors and direct them safely out of the building.

See point 5 above regarding evacuation of people with a disability.

7. What if someone refuses to leave the building?

Except by prior arrangement and only in exceptional circumstances as outlined above, everyone in a building must leave and go to the assembly area. This is not just University policy, but it is a requirement of fire safety legislation. Non-compliance must be considered a serious offense and disciplinary measures taken against the individual(s) concerned.