

F5 Prevention Measures and General Fire Procedures - Appendix C

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The following guidance note outlines the general fire safety standards expected in Care Services premises.

All premises will be managed by a designated member of staff (the Premises Supervisor) who will have responsibility for ensuring the necessary preventive measures are implemented and the fire precautions are correctly maintained at all times.

1. Housekeeping

Good housekeeping is the foundation of effective fire safety management. It ensures that escape routes and fire exits do not become blocked or obstructed and it makes a major contribution to reducing the risk of an accidental fire developing and spreading.

The aim of a good housekeeping regime is to minimise the amount of combustible material present wherever possible and to keep such materials separated from potential ignitions sources, for example heat generating appliances and electrical equipment. This is of particular importance in higher risk areas such as kitchens.

Control measures should also be in place to ensure an effective 'close down' procedure is implemented; this includes checking combustible waste has been removed from the premises.

In offices, the retention of large quantities of paper records can increase the fire hazard, particularly if not filed away in proprietary cabinets. To reduce the risk excess materials, stock, etc. should be stored in a dedicated storage area, storeroom or cupboard. Consideration should be given to archiving older documents at regular intervals.

Some premises will regularly receive deliveries of goods that can result in large quantities of combustible waste and packaging. The sighting, use and removal of these materials needs to be carefully managed to ensure that they cannot come into contact with potential ignition sources and that they do not obstruct escape routes.

Voids (including roof voids) should not be used for the storage of combustible material. Such voids should be secured or kept entirely open to allow for easy access for inspection and the removal of combustible materials.

It must be ensured that stored items do not prevent the correct operation of automatic fire detectors; sprinklers etc. or prevent automatic shutters and self-closing doors from closing.

Restricting the spread of fire and smoke - Display materials and decorations

To reduce the risk of display materials and decorations contributing to the risk of fire spread:

- avoid the use of displays in corridors and foyers;
- minimise the size and number of display areas to discrete, separated areas;

- ensure that there are no ignition sources in the vicinity;
- if possible treat displays with proprietary flame retardant sprays;
- consider the use of display boxes;
- keep displays away from curtains, light fittings and heaters;
- keep displays away from ceiling voids which may lack fire barriers.

Staff information should be confined to appropriately located display boards in areas away from escape routes. Display boards may be permitted on escape routes as long as they are no bigger than 1m² or have been enclosed in a sealed display case.

Schools in particular tend to have large numbers of displays and decorations. For more detailed guidance on the use of display materials in these premises refer to HM Government's publication, Fire Safety Risk Assessment: Educational Premises. See reference at end of this document.

Aerosols

Some aerosols can contain flammable products stored at pressure and they can present a serious fire hazard. When involved in a fire they can explode, produce fireballs and the container can be projected over large distances and have the potential for starting multiple fires. If a fire should occur, the presence of aerosols in a building can make it unsafe for firefighters to enter.

To minimise the risks posed by aerosols:

- All staff must be made aware of the need to minimise the number of pressurised aerosol containers stored within any one building.
- Aerosols should be stored preferably in a metal cabinet in a room with no sources of ignition.
- Damaged and leaking aerosol cans must be removed immediately to a safe, secure, well ventilated place prior to disposal.
- Wherever possible, alternative products should be used.

2. Arson

Fires started deliberately can be particularly dangerous because they generally develop much faster and may be intentionally started in escape routes. Of all the risk-reduction measures, the greatest benefit may come from efforts to reduce the threat from arson.

Readily available combustible/flammable material makes the potential effect of arson more serious. Therefore large amounts of combustible material should not be stored in areas where the public would normally have access.

All waste material should be stored in suitable containers whilst awaiting removal from the premises.

If bins, particularly wheeled bins, are used outside, they should be positioned away from the building wherever possible. Ideally, they will be secured in position or held in a compound to prevent them being moved to a position next to the building and used as a fuel source for an arson attack.

If building/alteration work involves the use of waste skips they must not be positioned against a building. They should normally be a minimum of 6 meters away from any part of the premises.

Although a building may not have been the target of an arson attack, the occurrence of other small, deliberately set fires in the locality can indicate an increased risk to the premises. Staff should be suspicious of any small 'accidental' fires on the premises and investigate them fully and record the findings. Reports in local papers of arson taking place in the locality should also be a cause for concern.

3. Electrical safety

Defective and poorly maintained electrical equipment can be a significant cause of accidental fires. The main causes are:

- Overheating cables and equipment, e.g. due to overloading circuits, bunched or coiled cables or impaired cooling fans;
- Incorrect installation or use of equipment;
- Little or no maintenance and testing of equipment;
- Incorrect fuse ratings;
- Damaged or inadequate insulation on cables or wiring;
- Combustible materials being placed too close to electrical equipment which may give off heat even when operating normally or may become hot due to a fault;
- Arcing or sparking by electrical equipment;
- Damage to insulation surrounding electrical conductors.

All electrical equipment operated on Care Services premises will be installed and maintained in a safe manner by a competent person.

All electrical installations will be regularly inspected in accordance with the Electricity at Work Regulations 1989 (EAW Regulations).

Portable electrical equipment will be visually inspected and undergo portable appliance testing ('PAT') at intervals suitable for the type of equipment and its frequency of use.

The use of low voltage equipment should conform to the requirements of the Electrical Equipment (Safety) Regulations 1994 including the requirement to be CE marked.

Staff must use electrical equipment responsibly and in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions, and should ensure that:

- Equipment is not overloaded
- Fuse ratings are correct;
- Where appropriate the equipment has been PAT tested.
- The equipment is clear of combustibile material;
- Cables and leads are not exposed to damage by furniture or people walking over them;
- The use of electrical adaptors and extension leads is avoided wherever possible;
- Equipment is isolated from the power supply when not required.

Electrical Equipment

Many fires originate in electrical equipment. In order to reduce the risk of a fire occurring in equipment:

- All electrical equipment must be correctly maintained. Portable electrical equipment should be PAT tested.
- Larger appliances, including catering appliances, should be inspected and maintained as recommended by the manufacturer.
- Ventilation points on equipment should be cleaned regularly to prevent them becoming clogged or blocked, causing overheating.
- Extraction equipment in catering environments should be cleaned regularly to prevent the build-up of excessive grease deposits.
- Automatic or manual safety features and cut-outs must be regularly checked for correct operation.

Electrical equipment should be kept clear of combustibile material as far as practicable. This is of particular importance in higher risk areas such as kitchens, laboratories etc.

Arrangements should be in place for an effective 'close down' procedure that includes checking all appliances are turned off (where practicable).

4. Heating Equipment

Fixed heating installations provided in Care Services buildings will be regularly maintained. Gas and oil fired central heating boilers will be serviced on an annual basis by an approved contractor. More frequent servicing will be carried out if indicated by the manufacturer.

In some instances the fixed heating installation will be supplemented through the use of portable heating appliances. Individual portable heating appliances require particular care if they are to be used safely. The greatest risks arise from lack of maintenance and staff unfamiliarity with the correct method of use.

The following rules should be observed:

- The use of radiant heaters will not be permitted in Care Services premises. Convector or fan heaters will be used in preference as they present a lower risk of fire and injury
- All heaters should be kept clear of combustible materials. They should be positioned where they will not cause an obstruction and must not be used within escape routes.
- Wherever possible portable heaters should preferably be secured in position when in use.
- Staff are not permitted to introduce their own portable heaters into Cumberland Council premises.

5. Cooking

Typical installations used in cooking processes include deep fat fryers, ovens, grills, surface cookers, ductwork, flues, filters, hoods, extract and ventilation ducts and dampers. The main cause of fire is ignition of cooking oil, combustion of crumbs and sediment deposits, and ductwork fires from a build-up of fat and grease.

In order to reduce the risk of fire resulting from cooking processes within Care Services premises:

- all cooking appliances will be subject to regular cleaning to prevent build-up of crumbs and other combustible material;
- Heat/oil levels in deep fat fryers will be monitored.
- cooking oil will be replaced at regular intervals (dependent upon the frequency of use);
- a programme of electrical and mechanical maintenance will be in place for all cooking appliances; and
- All gas appliances will be subject to an annual service by a competent person.
- Ductwork and extraction systems will be cleaned as recommended in the Building & Engineering Services Association Guidance Document DW/172

6. Smoking

Care Services has a legal obligation to comply with the requirements of the Health Act 2006 and there is a strict no smoking policy in all care premises.

Care Services policy for the control and management of resident's who wish to smoke can be found in Council Smoke Free Workplace policy.

7. Dangerous Substances

Where Dangerous Substances are present, in the case of care premises this is most likely to be compressed medical oxygen, additional fire precautions may be needed to take account of the greater risks that may be posed by the storage and use of these substances.

The following principles will reduce the risk from fire:

- Wherever possible substitute highly flammable substances and materials with less flammable ones;
- Reduce the quantity of dangerous substances to the smallest reasonable amount necessary for running the business or organisation;
- Correctly store dangerous substances, e.g. in a fire-resisting enclosure. All flammable liquids and gases should ideally be locked away, especially when the premises are unoccupied, to reduce the chance of them being used in an arson attack; and
- Ensure that staff are aware of the fire risk the dangerous substances present and the precautions necessary to avoid danger.

Note that certain substances and materials are by their nature, highly flammable, oxidising or potentially explosive. These substances are controlled by other legislation in addition to fire safety law, in particular the Dangerous Substances and Explosive Atmospheres Regulations. Where a dangerous substance is used the supplier should be able to provide detailed advice on safe storage and handling.

Highly flammable liquids present a particularly high fire risk. For example, a leak from a container of flammable solvents, such as methylated spirit, will produce large quantities of heavier-than-air flammable vapours. These can travel large distances, increasing the likelihood of their reaching a source of ignition well away from the original leak, such as a basement containing heating plant and/or electrical equipment on automatic timers.

For these reasons highly flammable liquids will not be stored on Care Services premises unless it is absolutely necessary. In such circumstances the Corporate Health and Safety Team should be consulted for further advice.

On some occasions, e.g. summer events where a barbecue is used, it might be necessary to provide an LPG cylinder. Where this is the case an appropriate risk assessment must be in place. The cylinder must not be brought into the care home and must be removed from site at the end of the event. Under no circumstances should LPG cylinders be stored within the grounds of a care home.

8. Routine Building Checks

To confirm that the above standards are maintained and that the necessary control measures are implemented the person with responsibility for fire safety within a building should undertake regular inspections of the building and its surroundings.