

## **Covid-19 Secure and Fire Safety for schools**

During this pandemic our attentions should not be taken off the fire safety of our school buildings. Fire safety is as relevant as ever and we continue to witness devastating fires in other places causing business disruption and property damage. Such incidents are:

- A fire which was declared a major incident where 20 fire engines attend at its height, and drew resources from Cheshire and Greater Manchester fire and rescue services and multi-agency partners. Firefighters spent more than 26 hours dealing with the fire on an industrial estate in Earlestown last month.
- Two further fires at industrial sites in Merseyside took place the following day, again requiring significant emergency service resources.

On the back of these and a number of similar incidents, Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service carried out checks and the Station Manager Bill Shepherd, MFRS Protection department, said:

“We know that the current COVID-19 pandemic has adversely affected a number of businesses across Merseyside, through reductions in staffing levels and disruption to normal working practices. However, it is vital that business owners continue to prioritise the fire safety of the business, the safety of the people working there and/or those visiting the business. Coronavirus is not an excuse for disregarding your responsibilities and businesses must ensure that they have an adequate amount of competent people to help in the implementation of both preventative and protective fire safety measures”.

As the station manager said regarding businesses same is applicable to schools. Most schools remained open for the children of key workers operating on minimal capacity or occupancy. As government guidance changes and lockdown restrictions are easing, more and more children will be returning to school but we understand that schools are still not operating at what they would deem to be ‘normal’.

If you have absent staff, you must ensure that there are enough adequately trained staff on-site at all times to ensure fire safety measures are not adversely affected. Because you are working differently you must think through and adequately address any impact this will have on your usual fire safety strategy.

Schools should continue to maintain and regularly test the fire safety provisions; including testing your fire alarms and carrying out regular fire drills. Schools should also be taking the necessary steps to protect themselves from arson, including removing combustible materials from the site or ensuring they are stored securely out of sight. Entrances and exits of buildings should be kept clear at all times and stock should not be kept in excessive amounts.

There are a number of steps that schools can take to reduce their risk of fire:

1. **COMPETENT PERSONS (FIRE WARDENS):** Ensure you have an adequate amount of competent persons to help in the implementation of preventative and protective fire safety measures. If you have absent staff you must ensure that there are adequately trained staff on-site at all times, to ensure the fire safety measures are not adversely affected.
2. **PROTECTION FROM ARSON:** If your business is closed for an extended period of time, ensure it is secure and continue with usual measures to prevent arson:
  - 2.1 Any combustible materials should be removed from site or stored securely
  - 2.2 Remove or store all rubbish securely away from the premises
  - 2.3 Keep all entrances and exits clear at all times
  - 2.4 Stock should not be kept in excessive amounts
3. **FIRE SAFETY TESTING:** Onsite fire safety provisions should be tested regularly. This includes carrying out alarm tests and fire drills.
4. **FIRE DOORS:** Do NOT prop open fire doors, even if this is intended to minimise contact between staff and door handles. We would advise schools to follow Public Health Advice around regularly washing your hands for 20 seconds or more, use of hand sanitisers, cleaning to minimise the spread of coronavirus.
  - 3.1 If it is intended to use door wedges then a robust policy must be put in place to ensure that these are not left in place during either an evacuation or fire drill.
  - 3.2 Remember improper use of door wedges can damage your fire door hinges
  - 3.3 Ensure **all** doors are closed at the end of each school day before or during lockup.
5. **LONE WORKING:** With a reduced workforce, there may be an increased likelihood of people working alone within buildings. You need to ensure that these people are provided with adequate warning in case of fire so they do not become trapped.
6. **FIRE RISK ASSESSMENT:** It may be necessary to review your fire risk assessment during this time to ensure suitable and sufficient measures are in place.
7. **SECURE BUILDINGS:** Try to ensure premises are regularly checked to ensure that the security of the building is not compromised and identify any

attempts of arson. Any issues should be reported to the police or follow your internal security arrangements.

8. **BURNING WASTE ON COMMERCIAL SITES:** Remember, it is illegal to burn most types of waste. Burning waste such as treated wood, tyres, plastics, rubber and oil can seriously harm health and pollute the environment. People face a fine of up to £50,000 for illegally managing waste.
9. **STORAGE OF FLAMMABLE LIQUIDS:** Remember hand sanitisers are highly flammable liquids therefore necessary care and consideration is required in their storage.

9.1 Ensure the flammable store has no sources of ignition

9.2 Ensure the store room is adequately fire separated to one hour from other areas

9.3 Doors must be locked shut at all times

9.4 Keep the stock of the flammable liquids to minimum as possible