



Education
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Fire risk during school maintenance or building works

November 2016

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Construction activity involving hot works

Any construction activity involving hot works has the potential to cause a serious fire.

This document is to raise awareness of a school and contractors legal duty. This comes under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2015. This applies to the fire risks created by the hot work activities of contractors.

Hot works involve many activities including;

- plumbing with the use of heat guns and blow torches
- roofing activities using Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) fuelled torches and bitumen burners.

This document links to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) website where advice documents can be downloaded for free. Schools should refer to the links to detailed guides on the final page and not only rely on this signposting document.

Any outbreak of fire threatens the safety of those on site including school occupants and those in adjacent properties. Serious fires can lead to a loss of school provision and the need to find safe and suitable alternative accommodation.

Fire can be a hazard in refurbishment and maintenance work when there is a lot of dry timber or where flammable materials such as adhesives, insulating materials and soft furnishings are present.

Roof work is particularly risky due to the dry nature of roof timber and the use of Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) fuelled torches and bitumen burners in close proximity to flammable materials. Fire can travel undetected beneath roof coverings to parts of the roof that are outside the immediate work area. Also fire can smoulder unnoticed and develop some time after the completion of hot works.

Fires can be prevented by careful planning and controlling of the hot works activity. This matter is not for the contractor alone. Responsibility is shared by the school and the contractor under section 2 and 3 of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974.

Health and Safety support

When planning construction and/or maintenance activity, the school should consult with their competent health and safety advisor.

Pre-work action

Before undertaking the work the following basic steps should be taken –

1. The school should appoint competent representative(s) who are able to manage/advise on contractor activities. They should have health and safety knowledge sufficient for the work planned. The representative(s) should be available throughout the duration of the contractor's activities.
2. Appoint a competent contractor. The contractor should be experienced in the kind of work you are planning and have liability insurance that reflects the risk involved.
3. Meet with the contractor and agree the works. The contractor should be asked to explain how they will manage fire risks. The contractor should be expected to explain the site setup, emergency access and egress, protection of the school escape routes, means of identifying fire, means of alerting the school, fighting fire and summoning help.
4. The contractor should be able to explain the steps of the hot work activities, the fire risk at each step and the measures to control the risk. This includes the use of permits to work and the mandatory "fire watch" inspection after the cessation of hot working.
5. The contractor should produce documents that are specific to your site and work activity. This should include a site and task specific Risk Assessment and Method Statement (RAMS).

Site setup

The contractor should set up the site as agreed. Any changes should be challenged and should not be agreed where they create uncontrollable fire risks. Means of escape, summoning help and fighting fire should be checked for both the school and the work area.

Hot works permit to work

Before hot works commence a permit should be issued by the school to the contractor that details the work and control measures. This permit should be returned to the school by the contractor to sign off after the completion of the post hot works fire watch each day. The school should check to see that works finished at the agreed time to see if the fire watch takes place. A school representative trained to an appropriate level of site safety, appropriately dressed and complying with site safety rules should visit the works area if safe to do so. They should confirm there is no evidence of fire before signing off the permit. A new permit should be issued for each day of hot work activity.

Permit to work procedure

A permit to work is a formal management document issued by a responsible person on behalf of the school that authorises the hot works to take place. The school should use its own permit to work procedure. By agreement the school can rely upon the contractor's permit to work procedure where it deals with the risks to the school. The HSE states that permits should contain –

- The location and nature of the hot works
- The proposed time and duration of the hot works
- The permit time limit validity
- The name of the person in control of the activity

The permit should detail the precautions to be taken, including –

- clearing the surrounding area of all loose combustible material
- checking for combustible material on both sides of a wall or partition, where work takes place only on one side;
- having suitable extinguishers at hand and a watch kept for fire during the work and following completion;
- protecting combustible material which cannot be cleared;
- examining the hot work area thoroughly some time after the work has finished (typically this will be at least an hour, but ignition can sometimes occur much later than this – inform the night security guards or onsite staff if present where hot work has been going on and ask them to check these areas); and
- in view of the potential risk, it is a sensible precaution for all hot work to stop by a safe period before the end of the day.

Further details

Out of hours working

No hot work activities should take place without a school representative being present on site to liaise with the contractor and ensure that agreed systems of work are being followed. This includes the daily issuing of hot work permits and the undertaking of fire watch.

Emergency action

In the event of a fire the schools emergency evacuation procedure should be used including summoning the fire service. Contractors should raise the alarm with the school immediately to allow escape and they should also summon the fire service (as well as the school doing so). There should be enough operatives working to allow the school to be informed immediately whilst others tackle the fire if safe to do so.

Signposting guidance that should be followed

The school should follow the links to the appropriate documents below at the HSE website (www.hse.gov.uk). Tasks and projects need clear thought and detailed planning with support from your competent health and safety advisor. Information on the relevant subjects can be found by following the links –

1. [Fire risks](#)
2. [Fire Safety in Construction](#) (HSG 168)
3. [Health and Safety in Construction](#) (HSG 150)
4. [Construction \(Design and Management\) Regulations 2015](#) (L153)
5. [Contractors](#)
6. [Managing Contractors - A guide for employers](#) (HSG159)
7. [Get Competent Advice](#)



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