

# Fire Evacuation Policy

## Introduction

This policy is designed to ensure, so far as reasonably practicable, fast and safe evacuation of University premises in the event of an emergency in compliance with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order. All staff, students, contractors and visitors are required to comply. All staff and many students receive training on induction.

Fire escape routes, mainly comprising corridors and staircases, are of 30min fire resistant construction as a minimum. Maximum single direction travel distance to a place of relative safety is 18m. All routes are fitted with appropriate exit signage and emergency lighting. All fire doors and emergency lighting units are tested annually as a minimum.

As far as is reasonably practicable, fire escape routes are maintained as fire sterile areas i.e. free of obstructions, flammable material and ignition sources. Agreement must be obtained from a Fire Safety Officer before any item can be placed in a corridor. Contract works which may affect means of escape are subject to a 'Permit to Work' scheme which ensures that suitable alternative arrangements are in place.

All substantial buildings are fitted with comprehensive fire alarm systems. The requirement to evacuate is communicated by operation of the fire alarm sounders augmented with flashing white beacons on the ceilings in some areas. Red flashing beacons above doors indicate that an alarm has sounded in the area beyond, hence no entry is permitted. Although sounders may be silenced whilst an incident is being dealt with, the red beacons will continue to function.

In the event of an alarm, all persons are required to leave the affected area immediately; failure is a disciplinary offence. Managers, teaching staff and people organising events or meetings are responsible for ensuring people under their control evacuate immediately; staff and students are responsible for their visitors.

As most buildings are effectively open to the public with little entry control, a sweep system is employed rather than a roll call. Sweeps are performed by designated trained Evacuation Stewards and/or Patrol/Security staff.

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## **Standard Evacuation**

In some buildings, initial evacuation may only be required for a limited area, usually a corridor or floor. If an alarm is heard and occupants are unsure if it is for their area they are required to evacuate anyway. In other buildings and in the event of any substantial fire, the whole building will be evacuated.

Anyone who suspects that there may be someone in an area affected by fire or smoke is required to report this directly to the Patrol/Security Staff or Fire Service without delay; this may be in person or by telephoning the emergency number for the location from a safe place.

In the event of evacuation of a part of a building, occupants need only evacuate into an unaffected area where the sounders are not operating; passing a red beacon when evacuating indicates leaving the affected area. People who have evacuated must not congregate in the access to the area. Evacuation Stewards will sweep the area and report to the Patrol/Security Staff on their arrival.

In the event of a whole building alarm, occupants must proceed to the designated Assembly Points. These are usually identified by signage and staff will be informed of their appropriate Assembly Points on induction. Evacuation Stewards will sweep their areas and report to the Assembly Point; the first to arrive will take charge, collate the findings of all stewards and pass the information to the Patrol/Security Staff.

Patrol/Security Staff or other designated persons will attend the area of the alarm; they will act as the Evacuation Stewards where there is no provision. Patrol/Security Staff main responsibilities are to establish the cause of alarms, prevent entry into affected areas, deal with the incident and assist the Fire Service. Staff may be required to assist in preventing entry if necessary.

Re-entry is not permitted until notified by the Patrol/Security Staff or when the flashing red beacons cease operating.

## **Arrangements for persons who may have difficulty**

Provision of timely assistance is difficult due to the peripatetic activities of most building users hence building design and management arrangements are in place to enable self-evacuation as far as is reasonably practicable.

Every effort is made to identify people who may have difficulty evacuating. This includes temporary impairment as well as registered disabilities. Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans (PEEPs) and assistance are provided as necessary. The main impairment and arrangements follow:

**Mobility:** slow moving, difficulty descending stairs, limited by distance.

- All areas accessible to mobility impaired people have suitable means of escape except at the Colchester campus- below Level 5 of Waterstone's building; Level 3 of 2001 building; Psychology building mezzanine level. Those responsible are aware and ensure facilities are provided elsewhere.
- Bi-directional escape is available in most areas. Single direction travel distance to a place of relative safety is within Government advised limits in all new builds and most of the older property.
- Level final exits are provided where practical.
- All lifts at the Colchester campus (except the Towers) are adapted to be safe to use in a fire. At Southend there are suitable lifts in The Gateway Building, University Square and the Forum. There is no access above the ground floor in Clifftown Studios or at Loughton.
- Evacuation chairs and trained operators are available where there are no suitable lifts or lifts are out of order; training is offered to potential users and carers.
- Disabled Refuges with communication systems to summon assistance are in place.
- Horizontal evacuation into unaffected parts of the building is available in most areas of the main academic building and the Library on the Colchester campus.
- Provision of signage for suitable/unsuitable exit routes is programmed.

Note: Our arrangements may not be sufficient for more than 2 or 3 mobility impaired people in one length of corridor. Where larger numbers of mobility impaired people are expected for events etc, a specific risk assessment will be required and venue choice will be crucial; HHS, Sports Sciences, Venue Essex and room bookings are aware.

**Sight:** Difficulty identifying exit routes or obstructions or reading signage, particularly emergency action notices.

- Exit routes well lit
- Doors/frames in contrasting colours to walls; edge marking of stairs
- Familiarised with routes, instructions, emergency action notices etc.
- May need to be accompanied until routes learned or when in unfamiliar areas.

**Hearing:** difficulty hearing fire alarms or shouted instruction.

- New buildings have flashing beacons fitted in all corridors, circulation spaces and large rooms as standards. Units are fitted to rooms (and main exit route from them) known to be used by staff/degree students needing them. Existing areas are retro fitted as standard when refurbished.
- Deaf alerters (units which vibrate under a pillow and have a beacon attached) issued in all accommodation when required.
- May need to be accompanied when using areas without beacons fitted.

**Dexterity/strength:** (arthritis is the commonest form of disability in the UK): Difficulty manipulating door handles/snibs; unable to open doors.

- Knobs/snibs changed on rooms/routes usually used. Programme in place to replace knobs and snibs on main routes.
- Door opening pressures tested to ensure within advisory limits.
- Automatic opening main exterior doors are fitted in most areas.
- May need to be accompanied in severe cases.

**Cognitive issues:** (ranging from severe learning difficulties to occasional panic attacks): May not understand/follow instructions; may not act as normally expected.

- Additional training delivered as necessary.
- Likely to need to be accompanied.
- Staff may be referred to Occupational Health for advice and assistance (panic attacks, PTSD etc.).

**Do not understand English or read signs:** Awareness of evacuation arrangements etc. Unable to interpret signs/instructions/warnings.

- Pictograph signage fitted in accommodation.
- Most are pre-sessional/language school students; efforts are made to supply information in their own language before arrival. Translated instructions, information and training delivered to pre-sessional students by the Department of Language and Linguistics.
- Emergency fire and first aid notices are available in the following languages:
- Arabic Bengali Chinese French German Gujarati Hindi Italian Japanese Malay Portuguese Russian Spanish Urdu
- Supervision/Buddy systems

## Emergency Action Instructions

### Shout Out:

- Do not attempt to extinguish fires unless you have received training.
- Raise the alarm verbally, evacuate and break the glass on a red call point on your way out.

### Get Out:

- Evacuate the area immediately you hear the alarm. If you are unsure that the alarm applies to you, evacuate anyway 'If in doubt get out'. Do not delay to finish tasks, collect items or lock doors. Your safety is paramount. Failure to evacuate is a disciplinary offence as it can put the Evacuation Stewards, Patrol Staff and Fire Service personnel at risk.
- Visitors and students you are teaching are your responsibility, ensure they evacuate.
- Do not run, it can cause panic and injury.
- Close doors behind you as you leave. This will slow the spread of fire and smoke considerably and help to protect other people. Do not lock them unless there is a high security risk.
- In the event of evacuation of a part of a building, occupants need only evacuate into an unaffected area where the sounders are not operating; passing a red beacon when evacuating indicates leaving the affected area. In the event of a whole building alarm, proceed to the designated Assembly Points.
- Following the green running man and arrow signs, they will direct you on the shortest exit route. Should the route be blocked turn around and follow the signs in another direction.
- Assist disabled persons. They will generally have prepared escape plans which you can help them with.
- Report information to Patrol/Security staff on areas or people affected by smoke or fire, or people who are missing or have failed to evacuate as soon as possible.

If you cannot escape the area do not panic. Get as far away from the fire as you can, preferably on a lower floor. Most rooms in the University will provide protection for at least an hour, staircase enclosures for two. Contact security/patrol staff using the emergency numbers for your location. These will be displayed on emergency notices or can be found at:

<http://www.essex.ac.uk/students/campus/emergency.aspx>.

### Stay Out:

- Never enter an area where a red light is flashing. Some of the University's buildings have zones with flashing red lights to indicate that this is where the fire is.
- Keep away from the exterior doors, The Fire Service may need access and you may block the exit for others.
- Wait at the assembly point.
- Do not enter when the alarm stops, it may have been silenced for the Fire Service. Wait to be told by Patrol Staff/ Security or for the flashing light to stop.