



Directorate of Education & Leisure

ARSON PREVENTION POLICY

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1.0 Rationale

Arson, as defined by the Criminal Damage Act 1973, is “the unlawful damage by fire of property belonging to another.”

1.2.0 Scope

Arson accounts for 21% of fires in all premises. The incidence of arson in all types of premises is increasing and is recognised as a major cause of fire.

1.3.0 Principles

1.3.1 Premises within the Borough may be vulnerable to arson attacks due to:

- The ease of access to sites.
- Vandalism.
- Poor housekeeping.

1.3.2 Reduction in the incidence of arson will benefit everyone by:

- Providing a safer environment for staff and pupils.
- Ensuring that buildings and facilities are not lost due to the effects of fire.

- The damage done by fire can be very costly, taking financial resources away from the provision of educational needs.
- 1.3.3 The Borough views arson as preventable, if not in its entirety then to such a degree that its effects are minimised.

2.0 ARSON POLICY

2.1.0 Core Principles

The Borough believe that minimising the incidence of arson to property and thereby helping to provide a safe environment for service users, staff and other person on our sites, and protecting essential resources is a high priority. To achieve this, the Borough will ensure that there will be a high level of management commitment and adequate resources directed to arson prevention measures. This will apply to all Borough premises and staff.

2.2.0 Common Standards

The Borough will develop a management plan to address arson covering the following areas:

- Risk management
- Security arrangements
- Systems for fire alarm and detection

- Fire containment and extinguishments
- General fire safety policies and precautions

3.0 IMPLEMENTATION AND COMPLIANCE

3.1.0 Responsibilities of all Staff

3.1.1 Staff are obliged to adhere to this policy. Managers at all levels are responsible for ensuring that the staff for whom they are responsible are aware of and adhere to this Policy.

They are also responsible for ensuring staff are updated in regard to any changes in this Policy.

3.1.2 The Borough management will recognise the cause and effects of arson and will encourage measures recommended to combat arson and will promote good practice.

3.1.3 Staff should be aware of the possibility of arson and should politely challenge strangers and report anyone of whom they have suspicions.

Combustible materials should be stored securely and waste not allowed to accumulate.

3.2.0 Responsibilities of Location Managers

3.2.1 A named person will be identified for each location from where the Borough has responsibility. The Location Manager will ensure that this Policy is accessible and up-to-date.

3.2.2 Department heads will ensure that a high level of security is maintained to prevent unauthorised access within their department and that legitimate visitors can be identified and access controlled. Procedures to prevent the possibility of arson are to be implemented and regularly reviewed.

3.2.3 Line managers are to investigate any outbreak of fire and if there is any suspicion that arson could be the cause, any material evidence should be safeguarded for the attention of the Police/ Fire Service.

3.2.4 Fire Safety Advisors will make recommendations to management regarding arson prevention measures. Fire risk assessment of premises will take into account the risk from arson and the measures to minimise the risk.

Fire safety training should include arson awareness and prevention.

3.3.0 Corporate Oversight

The Borough will take steps to ensure that all staff and Management adhere to this Policy.

4.0 REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

H.M Government Fire Safety Risk Assessment Guides:

Offices and Shops

Residential Care Premises

Sleeping Accommodation

Educational Premises

All above documents can be downloaded at
www.communities.gov.uk

5.0 DISTRIBUTION

5.1.1 This Policy will be available at all the Boroughs designated locations.

Copies will also be available on the Intranet.

6.0 REVIEW

6.1.1 This Policy will be reviewed bi-annually.

7.0 ADVICE FOR SCHOOLS PREMISES

How serious is the problem

Statistics from insurers and fire protection organisations estimate that between 70-75% of school fires can be attributed to arson. However, this is not the full picture as fire brigades are not always summoned to fires, particularly where they have self-extinguished, or are put out by staff. In addition to the financial costs, many fires will result in consequential loss, such as the destruction of irreplaceable records, teaching notes, course-work for examinations and in some instances, the need to find alternative, temporary accommodation.

Who are the arsonists?

Fires in schools are most likely to be started by pupils, ex-pupils or their friends, or others with knowledge of the school, perhaps living in close proximity. Of those individuals prosecuted, cautioned, or found guilty of arson, approximately 50% are aged between ten and sixteen. Don't imagine they will all be boys; girls are also capable of committing arson.

When and how do they strike?

Until recently, the majority of school fires occurred outside normal school hours. However, current trends show that fires during the school day are now far exceeding those occurring out of hours. Most fires will be started using combustibles found within the school grounds – rubbish from bins for example.

It is rare for accelerants, such as petrol, to be used unless left on site.

What can be done to deter the arsonists?

The prevention of arson falls into a logical process known as the five-point action plan.

1. Deter unauthorised entry onto the site.

Ensure perimeter fencing is maintained in good order and not easily breached.

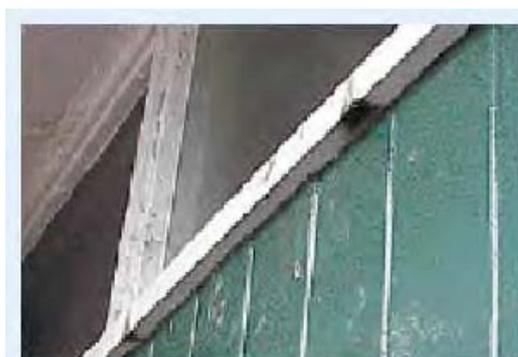
Consider the use of boundary signs to deter intruders, particularly at vulnerable spots.

2. Prevent unauthorised entry into the building.

The easiest points of entry into your premises will be via the doors and windows.

Skylights are also a weak point unless fitted with internal bars or grills.

Ensure your burglar alarm system is maintained fully functional.



This picture shows evidence of burning from a naked flame (probably a cigarette lighter). Such marks are conducive with opportunist vandalism, which may lead to a serious arson attempt.

Check your school buildings regularly for these warning signs.



✓ Ensure perimeter fencing is maintained in good order to deter unauthorised access to your site.



✗ Even well maintained fencing can be considered useless if trees are allowed to grow next to it as these will assist in gaining access over the fencing.

3. Reduce the opportunity for an intruder to start a fire.

Arsonists seldom bring combustible items with them but tend to use what is available on site.

Do you have external combustible storage within your school grounds? If you do, can it be removed or stored elsewhere?

4. Reduce the scope for potential fire damage.

Closing all doors at night will help to contain any fire or smoke within the room of origin, or at the very least, slow down the rate of fire growth.

5. Reduce subsequent losses and disruption resulting from a fire by preparing a disaster recovery plan (covered in ‘Contingency Planning and Disaster Recovery’).

The time and effort put into creating a plan will pay dividends in the event of serious fire, whether started accidentally or deliberately. Even well maintained fencing can be considered useless if trees are allowed to grow next to it as these will assist in gaining access over the fencing. Ensure perimeter fencing is maintained in good order to deter unauthorised access to your site.

Members of staff should be adequately trained in fire procedures, including how to summon the Fire Service, building evacuation and the use of fire extinguishers.

There is much that can be done to deter the ‘Arsonist,’ or limit the spread of smoke and flames in the event of an accidental or deliberately set fire involving school premises. Some of the precautions may be expensive to install or provide, but are usually cost effective should the worst happen. Into this category falls - extensive perimeter fencing, fixed (and possibly monitored) CCTV coverage, sprinkler systems and automatic fire detection.

However, a great deal can be achieved with little or no cost implications, particularly in relation to ‘housekeeping’ and staff training.

Here are a few examples:

- Any graffiti that appears on your school premises should be removed without delay. If it is left to accumulate, vandals and arsonists will begin to view the site as being a legitimate target of little or no value.
- Wheeled bins should either be kept in the bin room, or compound, with the door locked shut when not in use, or alternatively, secured immovable object, (e.g. metal barrier), by padlock and chain well clear of any building, preferably by a distance of at least 6 metres. If possible, bin lids should be secured outside normal school hours.

Remember! Rubbish is an ideal fuel for the ‘Arsonist’.

- Bins on wheels can be pushed against the building or, rubbish can be removed from the bins and piled against doors before being set alight.

Both are very common methods of attack.

✓ Bins are a common target for opportunist arsonists, who will usually find plenty of fuel inside to pursue their activities.



✗ Unless bins are chained to an immovable object, or secured in a bin room or compound, they may be pushed against school buildings and set alight.



- If schools use recycling bins in connection with fundraising activities, they should be located and secured in the same manner as described above. Regular collections should be arranged to avoid an accumulation of combustible material.
- External litterbins should not be fixed to the walls of the building, or under roofs constructed of combustible materials, but secured to the ground well

away from the any building. Ideally, such bins should be of metal construction.

- Try to avoid placing combustible items on windowsills. A common method of attack is to break a window and set fire to combustibles within reach.
- Burning materials are sometimes introduced into school premises via the letterbox. If you have a letterbox, which is seldom, or never used, consider having this opening permanently sealed. If the letterbox is essential, do you have a metal mailbox on the other side of the door? Such a box would ensure burning materials are contained and extinguished quickly due to oxygen starvation. Purpose designed fire-resistant boxes are also available which are capable of extinguishing fires involving flammable liquids, (known as ‘accelerants’). Once again, these openings are a common target for arsonists. Please think about it!
- Unless bins are chained to an immovable object, or secured in a bin room or compound, they may be pushed against school buildings and set light. Bins are a common target for opportunist arsonists, who will usually find plenty of fuel inside to pursue their activities.
- If you have a flat roof on your premises, ensure that regular checks are made for breaches in security, pay particular attention to skylights.
- Ensure that matches or lighters are not left in the staff room overnight. Opportunist vandals have found these items very useful in the past!
- Schools should foster good relationships with neighbours, who are able to observe unlawful activity at the premises when closed. Neighbours should be asked to contact the Police if they witness such activity.

Alternatively, they may contact

Crimestoppers on Tel: 0800 555 111,

Calls are free (except for some mobiles)

And the caller will remain anonymous.

- Where possible, schools should become involved in local neighbourhood watch schemes. Vandals are less likely to attack a school if there are strong ties with the local community.

- Where sustained vandalism or deliberate fire setting occurs at a school premises, the installation of a monitored CCTV system could be considered.



- Specialist advice from Police Crime Reduction Officer should be sought on such matters.
- If schools are open to the public outside normal hours (usually for evening classes), it is essential that visitors are restricted to authorized areas of the building, without compromising their means of escape. The gates to the school grounds should be secured promptly when all visitors have vacated the site.
- Arson attacks during school hours are on the increase. Areas targeted include toilets, cloakrooms and any other areas where young people may congregate unobserved. Extra vigilance is therefore required. A check on these areas after each lunch and break time by a nominated person would mitigate the chances of fires being started or developing.
- It is common practice for car thieves to deposit stolen vehicles on school playing fields before setting fire to them.

- A routine should be adopted, where by a nominated individual is responsible for ensuring that all doors and windows have been secured, once the building is vacated at the end of the day.
- Shrubs and undergrowth should not be allowed to encroach against buildings. In the summer, vegetation often becomes tinder dry and will burn vigorously.
- Sheds and other storage facilities should be sited at least 8 metres from buildings to prevent fire spread from one to the other.
- ‘Skirts’ should be fitted at the base of mobile classrooms, to prevent combustible materials being placed underneath and ignited, but remember, these should allow the free movement of air to prevent possible water condensation damage.

Using Prickly Plants as a Defence

The range of plants listed below are an attractive means of protecting your property, and are readily available from garden centres and nurseries. Consider planting a selection of these specially chosen plants as an alternative or addition to fencing.

Prickly planting is a visual deterrent and a physical barrier intended to complement and not replace traditional crime prevention measures such as locks, alarms and lighting.

Homegrown security can be adopted to protect all perimeters of your property and form a barrier around drainpipes and ground floor windows, making forced entry more difficult.

Good hedging plants:

- *Berberis x ottawensis* - Medium-sized deciduous shrub. Up to 6ft high. Red berries in autumn.
- *Berberis x stenophylla* - Medium-sized evergreen shrub. Up to 6ft high. Golden-yellow flowers in spring; black berries in autumn.
- *Crataegus monogyna* (Common Hawthorn) Used extensively throughout UK as hedging. White flowers in spring; red ‘haws’ in autumn. Plant as an impenetrable hedge.
- *Ilex x aquifolium* (Common Holly) Excellent hedging plant, usually grown as tree or bush. Up to 50ft high.

- *Prunus spinosa* (Blackthorn or Sloe) Large dense shrub, good for hedging. White flowers in spring; blue-black fruits in autumn.
- *Rosa rugosa* (Rubra) Dense shrub, good for hedging. Up to 6ft high. Perpetual flowering wine crimson flowers; red 'heps' or berries.

Plants to be trained up a wall:

- *Chaenomeles x superba* (Pink Lady) Small to medium sized deciduous shrub. Up to 6ft high. Grow trained against a wall. Rose pink flowers in spring; yellow quinces in autumn.
- *Pyracantha* (Orange Glow – Firethorn) Evergreen Shrub. Up to 16ft high when trained up wall. White flowers in spring; orange – red berries in autumn/winter.
- *Pyracantha* (Golden Charmer – Firethorn) Evergreen Shrub. Up to 16ft high when trained up wall. White flowers in spring, orange – yellow berries in autumn.

Shrubs:

- *Mahonia x media* (Winter Sun) Tall evergreen shrub. Up to 10ft high. Yellow flowers in autumn; blue-black berries in winter.
- *Hippophae rhamnoides* (Sea Buckthorn) Tall deciduous shrub. Up to 10ft high. Grows on any soil, providing a good windbreak. Silver, willow-like leaves in summer; orange berries in autumn.
- *Ulex europaeus* (Common Gorse) Dense, evergreen, spiny shrub, Up to 5ft high. Golden yellow flowers. Good on poor soil.

What if the Worst Should Happen?

The impact of fire in schools is both devastating and a potentially life threatening matter. Arson in school can occur at any time but as more and more attacks take place during school hours, the threat of injuries and death from fire are significantly increased. The most effective way to ensuring your school does not become another statistic of fire, is to have a sprinkler system installed.

Sprinkler systems will mitigate the effects of fire by containing it until the arrival of the Fire Service.

There still remains some general misconception regarding sprinklers – these are explained below: -

MYTH Water damage from sprinklers can be as great as fire damage.

TRUTH A sprinkler head discharges only 60 litres per minute, a fire-fighting hose discharges at least 600 litres per minute

MYTH Sprinklers regularly go off by accident.

TRUTH In reality the chances of a sprinkler discharging accidentally are around 16 million to 1.

MYTH If there is a fire, all sprinkler heads go off at the same time.

TRUTH Sprinkler heads are triggered individually and only the heads in the vicinity of the fire will operate.

MYTH Sprinkler systems are expensive.

TRUTH Systems may be as little as 2% of the overall building costs but may save millions in terms of damage to a property and lost education.