

# The RoSPA Occupational Safety & Health E-Bulletins

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### New schools not being fitted with fire sprinklers says BBC report

A BBC investigation has revealed that 43 per cent of new school buildings in England do not have fire safety sprinkler systems, in spite of government-issued guidance two years ago saying sprinklers should be fitted in almost all new schools. [↑](#) Top

Every week 20 schools are destroyed or damaged by fire but figures from the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) show that many local authorities are deciding not to fit sprinklers.

The Chief Fire Officers Association says those local authorities which choose not to fit them are putting the safety of pupils and staff at risk. It is calling for the government to make sprinklers mandatory in all new school buildings.

A spokesman for the DCSF said 72 out of 127 schools to have benefited from the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) investment programme are fitted with sprinkler systems.

He added: "In cases where sprinklers are not installed, schools may be fitted with alternative Fire Engineered Solutions, or for example in very low risk schools or those with a large atrium, sprinklers may not be the most appropriate form of fire protection.

"The provision of sprinklers is not a requirement of the building regulations. We expect that the education authority or funding body of the BSF scheme should request, as part of the employer's requirements, that a risk assessment be undertaken to assess the validity of providing sprinklers in the scheme.

"We urge all local authorities to ensure that schools within their areas have comprehensive fire safety management plans, fire-fighting equipment such as fire extinguishers on the premises and that they carry out regular fire drills.

"Ultimately what's most important is making sure children are aware of fire safety rules and how to evacuate a building quickly and calmly in the event of a fire."

The Welsh Assembly insists on sprinklers being fitted in all new school buildings which it funds, and has provided money to fit them in existing schools most at risk of arson.

In Scotland, a working group will advise ministers later this year on changes to school building safety regulations, including any move to make sprinkler systems mandatory.

Sprinklers are not mandatory in schools in Northern Ireland.

A spokesman for the Local Government Association said: "We would encourage all local authorities to include fire suppression systems - sprinklers - in new schools. The initial financial outlay is relatively small and will be recouped through lower insurance premiums."

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## New DCSF guidance on employing children

The Department for Children, Schools and Families has produced new guidance covering everything from the types of work children can and cannot do, through to the number of hours they can be required to work and specific health and safety requirements.



Recommendations regarding the hours children can work include:

- A child may not be employed before 7.00 am or after 7.00 pm.
- A child may not be employed before the end of the school day on any day on which the child has to go to school. But this rule can be, and frequently is, relaxed by bylaws to permit one hour's employment in the morning before school starts. It is important to check with the local authority where the employment is to take place what its bylaws say about employment on school days.
- A child may not be employed for more than two hours on a day on which he or she has to go to school, or on a Sunday.
- A child under 15 may not be employed for more than five hours on any day from Monday to Saturday on which he or she does not have to go to school.
- A child aged 15 or over may not be employed for more than eight hours on a weekday on which he or she does not have to go to school.
- A child may not be employed for more than 12 hours in any week if that week includes a day on which the child has to go to school.
- A child under 15 may not be employed for more than 25 hours in any week where that week does not include a day on which the child has to go to school.
- A child aged 15 or over may not be employed for more than 35 hours in any week where that week does not include a day on which the child has to go to school.

To download the guide visit:

[www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/download\\_as\\_doc.cfm?i\\_ID=12435](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/download_as_doc.cfm?i_ID=12435) ➔



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## School caretaker suffers chemical burns

A school caretaker suffered chemical burns and had to be hosed down by firefighters after a pipe burst spraying bleach over him. He was found on the floor in the plant room at Oak Grove College, a special needs school in Durrington.



Worthing fire commander Roy Barraclough said: "The man had been working on the system that puts chemicals into the school's hydrotherapy pool when a pipe split or ruptured and sprayed him with hydrochloride.

"It had gone onto his legs so we hosed him down with a hose reel and then gave him oxygen and waited for the ambulance."

Paramedics took the man, who was suffering from chemical burns and breathing difficulties, to Worthing Hospital.

An investigation into the incident has been launched.

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## Teachers turn to headsets to save their voices

One in ten teachers suffer voice problems as a result of speaking so much and so loudly to teach and maintain order in noisy classrooms. As a result, some are now being fitted with the wireless microphones worn by many singers on stage.



The equipment, linked to speakers around the classroom, not only prevents hoarseness but also helps pupils to hear better.

Thousands of schools in areas including Birmingham, Swindon, Norfolk, Suffolk, Devon and Wandsworth, South West London are using the system.

Hertfordshire's 525 primary and secondary schools have also been equipped with 2,000 amplification systems. These consist of loudspeakers around the classrooms, a wall-mounted box and a small microphone worn by the teacher. The teacher's voice is amplified, meaning that all the children in the class can hear clearly.

Matthew Heasman, headteacher of Broadfield Primary in Hemel Hempstead, said there had been a 'noticeable' improvement in standards as a result. "We have installed units in all our classrooms in response to enthusiasm for this simple but hugely effective technology," he said.

About 150 classrooms in primary schools in Wandsworth also have the system. This was initially to help children with hearing problems, but schools have been buying the equipment from their own budgets as it has proved so effective.

However, Phyllida Furse of Voice Care Network UK, which runs workshops for teachers, said headsets should be a last resort if no other changes can be made, for example to the acoustics of a room. "Headsets don't cure the problem of the person's voice production in the first place. It's like putting ointment on but it doesn't cure the wound."

For the full article go to:

[www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1220963/Teachers-turn-pop-headsets-save-voices.html#ixzz0VRSixHIL](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1220963/Teachers-turn-pop-headsets-save-voices.html#ixzz0VRSixHIL) ➡

## London Pensions Fund Authority set up mesothelioma compensation fund

An £85 million asbestos compensation fund has been set up in the public sector, amid warnings that medical claims will double in the next decade.



The London Pensions Fund Authority is putting aside the cash following estimates that the number of cases will rise to 25 a year and total more than 400 by 2035. The organisation deals with about 12 claims a year over asbestos-related illness. But a landmark legal case has led to the authority paying out over a teacher who was not shown to have had direct contact with the substance.

The widower of teacher Joan Henry, who died from mesothelioma, received £180,000 in an out-of-court settlement in July. Mrs Henry died in 2007 aged 57 after a 30-year career. She had worked in two east London schools whose buildings contained asbestos.

It was the first time the fund, which is responsible for former staff of the Inner London Education Authority and the Greater London Council (GLC) has paid compensation in a case that did not involve a manual labourer who had direct exposure to asbestos.

Mrs Henry's husband, Stephen, said he believed the "floodgates" could open for new claims, but feared the fund might have to be even bigger. "I hope that this case will help others receive compensation if they suffer similar tragedies.

"And what about the pupils? Parents need to know their children could be affected by this. Most Inner London Education Authority schools built around the same time had a similar amount of asbestos. Central government knows this stuff is there."

For further information on RoSPA E-Bulletins contact: [ebulletins@rospa.com](mailto:ebulletins@rospa.com)

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