

UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER.**FIRE SAFETY ADVICE NOTE NO 5.****Means of Escape – Housekeeping, Fire Safety Checks and Maintaining Clearways.****1. Introduction.**

This FSAN deals with Housekeeping and keeping Means of Escape Clear from obstruction and combustible items (building checks). It supplements FSAN No 3 and should be referred to as background reading in relation to this matter - especially when conducting fire safety building checks.

It is very important that designated means of escape are kept clear and free from combustible items and whilst it is acknowledged that our buildings need to be practical and comfortable for everyday use it is extremely important that they remain safe from fire and other hazards and allow a safe emergency evacuation route that persons can escape to a place of safety if a fire occurs.

2. How can you tell if it is a designated Means of Escape/ Fire Exit?

Various terminology is used in relation to a means of escape and it is worthwhile to explain the following: -

“Means of escape” is a broad term describing the available routes out of a building and generally comprises corridors, stairs entrance lobbies and general circulation spaces. Sometimes these are protected against fire and smoke but not always. The level of fire protection is determined by the risks associated with the height and layout of the building – for example, people in a building with a single staircase are more vulnerable than they would be in a multi-staircase building and therefore the level of fire protection is increased; similarly, a corridor which leads only one way (a dead end) is more of a risk than a corridor with ways out at either end so dead ends require greater fire protection.

Protection of escape routes is achieved primarily with fire resisting walls and floors and by the provision of fire resisting and self-closing doors.

The term “protected route” means an escape route which has some protection from fire. The level of protection will vary according to the building design and the term is thus generic as it doesn’t mean the same thing for every building.

Indeed an escape route may not be fully fire protected along all of its route. For example, when people initially respond to a fire alarm activation, they will likely start from a teaching space (which is unlikely to be protected), then into a corridor (which will be protected if a dead end but otherwise not) and then to either a building exit (if on the ground floor) or to a staircase (which invariably will be protected) and thence up or down to a building exit.

A designated Means of Escape should have fire directional signage, they usually have a fire point with a break glass point and fire extinguishers in place and provide a safe route to fire exits which should be kept clear and functional, this also applies to protected stairways and fire protected lobbies.

It is worth mentioning that Fire exits should have a sign on them and should be kept as a clearway on both sides of the door allowing people to pass clearly in the event of a fire.

A designated Means of Escape should have fire directional signage, they usually have a fire point with a break glass point and fire extinguishers in place and provide a safe route to fire exits which should be kept clear and functional. Fire exits should have a sign on them and should be kept as a clearway on both sides of the door. The whole route should be kept free and free from any obstacles or combustible items.

3. Purpose of this Guidance

Persons need to be aware that once a fire has started, been detected and a warning given, everyone in the premises should be able to escape to a place of total safety unaided and without the help of the fire and rescue service. However, some people with disabilities and others with special needs may need help from staff who will need to be designated and trained for the purpose.

Escape routes are designed to ensure, as far as possible, that any person confronted by fire anywhere in the building should be able to turn away from it and escape to a place of reasonable safety, e.g., a protected stairway. From there they will be able to go directly to a place of total safety away from the building. The width of escape routes is determined by the numbers of people anticipated to occupy the building so it is important that such routes are not “narrowed” by the introduction of furniture or storage.

It is especially important that a designated means of escape is **kept clear, unobstructed** and **free from combustible items** at all material times and such areas are designed to comply with this requirement.

Please note that from time-to-time, certain buildings may wish would have an event or display temporarily in the foyer of a building as an example, for guidance on this please see FSN 6 “The General Fire Safety Management of University of Manchester Events and Displays in Buildings”.

Notwithstanding the general principals outlined above, it may be permissible to place furniture/waste bins etc. in some corridors. Where such things are being

considered, the Fire Team must be consulted who will risk-assess the proposal taking into account the use, occupancy and layout of the building in question.

4. Items placed in Corridors, Stairways and Protected Lobbies.

Corridors and stairways that form part of protected escape routes should be always kept clear and hazard free. Items that may be a source of fuel or pose an ignition risk should never be located on any corridor, stairway or protected lobby that will be used as an escape route, this is of particular importance if the route is a dead end or there is only one way out.

This includes waste bins and notice boards. Such items should be carefully managed with waste bins regularly emptied and notice boards kept up to date with old notices removed and ideally being glass fronted to ensure any notices cannot be easily ignited.

Naturally, when contemplating introducing anything to such areas (even if non-combustible), they should only be done if it does not hinder, obstruct, or narrow the route which may compromise the safe and speedy evacuation of occupants in case of a fire.

If for any reason a means of escape is blocked, or if a fire exit cannot be opened upon operation, then this is a serious matter that needs to be reported and remedied straight away, helpdesk should be rang as a priority so that remedial action can occur, no delay should ensue as it places occupants in danger. (See FSAN 4 “Helpdesk use for Fire Safety Repairs”)

5. Visual checks of Means of Escape housekeeping.

- Corridors and stairways that form part of escape routes should be kept clear and hazard free at all times. Such routes designed with an additional level of protection for walls or ceilings where limited combustibility is required. Items that may be a source of fuel or pose an ignition risk should not normally be located on any walls or doors in corridors or any stairway that will be used as an escape route.
- This is especially important where a corridor or route is a dead-end situation, in such cases stringent building regulations are adopted to ensure such routes comply with fire safety regulations and do not have any combustible materials within, including notice boards, notices on doors and walls and other scenarios where combustible items are placed around.
- Refuse storage chambers, refuse chutes, and refuse hoppers should be sited and constructed in accordance with BS 5906 and be separated from other parts of the building by fire resisting construction and not be situated within a protected stairway or protected lobby. Access openings to refuse storage chambers should not be sited next to escape routes or

such routes. It is extremely important that checks are made to ensure that people do not place rubbish bins and containers within such areas.

- All Means of Escape routes should clear of obstructions inside and outside of the building.
- External escape routes are as important for escape purposes as internal staircases these routes are exposed to the elements and it is important to ensure that they are maintained in a safe and effective condition and free from obstruction and combustibles. This includes ensuring that the escape route is available safely during inclement weather.
- Keep areas outside final exit doors clear of obstructions and combustibles at all times and ensure that exits are clearly indicated.

6. Conclusion

This FSAN is aimed at clarifying what needs to occur to keep our buildings and occupants safe. It does not intend to be burdensome on occupants, rather, it aims to ensure that all persons are aware of the necessities to keep everyone safe in the event of a fire.

The safety of our occupants and University buildings is paramount. All escape routes are necessary and need to be kept clear of combustible materials and any obstacles so that they are available for use at all times allowing occupants to reach a place of safety in the event of a fire or other emergency. In the event of a fire, it is important to evacuate people as quickly as possible from the premises. Escape routes in a building should be designed so that people can escape quickly enough to ensure they are not placed in any danger from fire.