

Safetyline 84

H & S UPDATE DECEMBER 2007

Over the past 20 years there has been a sharp increase in the number of cases of **tuberculosis (TB)** in the UK, and those working in healthcare and education that are likely to come into contact with TB in the course of their employment are at risk. In these instances employers should carry out a risk assessment and introduce suitable preventative measures to minimise the risk of infection as well as information, and if required, training for staff. If appropriate health checks for staff should be provided. Information on TB is available from the Health Protection Agency at http://www.hpa.org.uk/infections/topics_az/tb/menu.htm and the Department of Health at <http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Policyandguidance/healthandsocialcaretopics/Tuberculosis/index.htm>. TB usually affects the lungs or lymph glands but any part of the body can be affected. The Bacteria causing the disease take the form of droplets that are spread through coughing or sneezing or even speaking. In most cases it is easily treated by antibiotics.

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*The European Parliament recently backed a compromise agreement with EU Governments to phase out **Mercury** in measuring devices such as thermometers and barometers. A ban is likely to be implemented sometime in 2008. New mercury fever thermometers and other devices e.g. manometers will be banned although it is expected there will be exemptions for the healthcare sector. Antique mercury-containing devices (i.e. over 50 years old) will be exempt.*

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The **fire evacuation drills** from academic building were very good this year, but we did see deterioration in the level of response at some residences and repeat drills have been undertaken at those properties which showed a marked improvement from the first drill. I'm afraid the reports on the fire drills are not ready but should be on our web site by the end of December.

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*Following the serious fire incident at the YEDL substation on Victoria Street which resulted in a significant **loss of power across the main campus on Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> November** please do look at advice available on the University's web site which indicates what you should consider when working in buildings when the power goes off. Buildings with little or no natural light in the staircases, in particular, should consider evacuating the building within the first 30 minutes as the emergency lighting systems are only designed to work for 3 hours maximum, but usually last less time so evacuation is necessary to avoid having to leave the building when the emergency lights are exhausted. We are aware of the emergency lighting and other issues that arose during the incident and Estates Services are working to address these issues. "Power Outage Advice" can be found at: - <http://safety.dept.shef.ac.uk/guidance/PowerOutageAdvice.pdf>.*

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The recent power loss incident highlighted that the University does not hold **current telephone contact details** for all relevant staff in Departments in the Control Room. If you haven't recently submitted up to date emergency contact information for your department in response to the recent e-mail from Safety Services, please do so as soon as possible. Thanks.

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*Over the past few weeks the **HSE** have been looking at our procedures and practices for managing slips and trips in university buildings and on how we manage our asbestos information for our small contractors and our own employees in Estates Services, CiCS and Departments. Discussions have been fruitful and we are currently reviewing systems, where appropriate, to improve our management of these activities with Departments. One recommendation was that all University staff should have some level of Asbestos Awareness training, in order that they understand the University's procedures and where to get information on asbestos in buildings. Technical staff in departments will be receiving information about more comprehensive asbestos awareness training which they should attend.*

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Thanks to all of you who have submitted the **health and safety self-audit returns**. I will respond to you all shortly.

Safety Services wish you all a very merry Christmas