

# Safetyline 89

H & S UPDATE MAY 2008

As we no longer print copies of the **Health and Safety Codes of Practice** for new starters at the University so it is very important that all new starters are aware that they can access an electronic copy of the relevant Code of Practice from [www.shef.ac.uk/safety/codes.html](http://www.shef.ac.uk/safety/codes.html). Those in science and engineering roles should be pointed to the "Full" Code whereas those working in non-science and non-engineering departments and roles to the "Abbreviated" version.

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*City of Bristol College was recently prosecuted for failure to adequately protect, train and supervise its staff and to safely store and manage a hazardous substance. A lecturer working in the College's motorcycle technology centre was preparing Nital, a Nitric Acid / ethanol mixture used in welding tests, when a **litre bottle of the Nital mixture exploded**. The lecturer suffered significant acid burns which required skin grafts and two operations to one hand. The incident happened in a room where hazardous substances are stored but he had not been trained to undertake the activity which led to his injuries. This incident highlights the instability of Nitric Acid and Ethanol mixtures which are explosive in concentrations of greater than 10% Nitric Acid. Great care must be taken when mixing Nitals by adding the acid to the alcohol slowly and stirring continuously. Solutions above 5% Nitric Acid in ethanol should not be stored in closed bottles as there is a constant evolution of gas which will over-pressurise a closed container. Also ethyl nitrate can be formed over time by this process which is explosive; as such minimum quantities of Nitals should be produced and the residue disposed of safely at the end of each day. The incident also highlights the need to clearly mark and separate Nitric Acid bottles from waste solvent bottles as small volumes of solvents accidentally added to concentrated Nitric Acid can cause an explosion. Make sure that CoSHH assessments for work with Nitric Acid and Nitals reflect the risks and are available to everyone working with these mixtures.*

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The **dangers of asbestos and its proper management** were emphasised by the successful prosecution of Kings College, Cambridge following an incident in 2006 when college employees painting the Keynes Hall Theatre were exposed to asbestos fibres. The College had permitted painters to work on materials containing asbestos without taking appropriate precautions. The materials concerned were of types that require a person to hold a license from the HSE before working on them. The College Clerk of Works was also fined £1000 and ordered to pay costs of £500 after pleading guilty to a charge laid under Section 7 of the Health & Safety at Work Act 1974 for failing to take reasonable care for the health and safety of both themselves and others

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*The **electronic Fire Training** package is in the process of being revamped and updated to load faster so that it will work much smoother than at present. The "loading" page that was added to indicate to users that the module was loading should no longer be necessary and will be removed. It is intended to add a feature to the assessment which checks the users last training session and welcomes them back with the date and last score.*

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As previously stated, **all Departments are require to ensure that the electrical integrity of all items of portable electrical equipment is tested at appropriate frequencies**, depending on the likelihood of damage, to ensure that it is safe to use. If the date on the sticker attached to an item of portable electrical equipment is out of date, then it is deemed to have failed the PAT test, whether it was tested or not, and should therefore be removed from the workplace, or made inoperable, and not used until it has been formally tested and proved safe by a competent tester with a sticker attached to indicate a future test date.

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If you are looking to take advantage of the spring weather and Mayday holidays to make changes to your home, bear in mind some of the main danger areas. Have a look at the new "timesonline" website, created by RoSPA and the Times produced as a **home safety guide** for its readers. [http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life\\_and\\_style/health/article2551258.ece](http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life_and_style/health/article2551258.ece) .

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