

# Safetyline 105

H & S UPDATE SEPTEMBER 2009

A colleague here at Sheffield recently experienced a **fire in a bedroom of his home** caused by an electric blanket which somehow had become damaged to the extent it actually caught fire when switched on. The smoke generated triggered a smoke alarm which prompted a check around the house to see what might have triggered the alarm. It was then the fire was discovered. Fortunately it was small enough to be smothered by a blanket but the resulting fire and smoke damage cost around £700 which doesn't take account of the disruption caused cleaning up, sorting out insurances and obtaining replacements. The cable appears to have become damaged during use and the 3 amp fuse didn't blow quick enough to prevent the overheating and subsequent fire. This incident highlights 2 important points: the need to **ensure your smoke alarms work correctly**, that you replace batteries when necessary and check that the alarm sounds, and that you **check the condition of electrical items periodically** as electric problems and faults are not unique to workplaces. Although Portable Appliance Testing is a workplace requirement, the principle of safe electrical equipment applies to our homes as well.

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*The **Health and Safety Induction Training package** can be used as part of your Induction training for new staff and research postgraduate students from now on. The package can be accessed from the Safety Service web site by clicking on the bottom right hand icon on our Home Page titled "Health and Safety Induction for New Starters to the University" and then following the relevant instructions in section 1. Section 2 has the instructions for Administrators who have been set up in the system to access the Administrators area.*

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Work is currently ongoing to **improve the management of vehicle and pedestrian traffic and parking up Back Lane** to improve the safety of this roadway for all users. A route is being marked out for pedestrians to use with handrails where practicable and gaps where access to the building or the inset areas is required, and I do ask that all pedestrians use the designated path.

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Two **Legionella awareness seminars** were held during July for Departmental Technicians who operate equipment holding or circulating water that could result in aerosols or mists in the 20-45°C temperature range. If there are any staff who were unable to attend either of the two events and who wish to attend one, please let us know and we will arrange a further seminar.

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Over the past few weeks several Universities have reported instances of **Winchesters of solvents "exploding"**; Chloroform, Dichloromethane and THF in particular. Suppliers have been contacted and they state that Winchesters are inspected prior to reuse but there have also been suggestions that there have been problems with refilling procedures or equipment. Where possible make sure that Winchesters are held in solvent bins which will contain spillages.

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*With a new academic year almost upon us, please do bear in mind that **mobility-impaired staff** and students will require evacuation arrangements (PEEPs) to be in place in the event of a fire alarm, power failure or lift failure if those persons work or have lectures or seminars above ground level. Information is available on Safety Services website but if you need help to make suitable arrangements then please do contact [safety@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:safety@sheffield.ac.uk) to make arrangements for us to meet with you and those persons requiring help.*

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In the March 2009 Safetyline, I reported that a researcher died as a result of an incident in which her **clothing caught fire** when using tert-butyl lithium. A fuller report of this incident can be found at: <http://pubs.acs.org/cen/news/87/i04/8704news1.html> and highlights the need for the correct protection to be provided and worn when working with dangerous substances.

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HSE are making around 50 of their most popular titles freely available in PDF format immediately with a further 180 to be made free by next March. <http://books.hse.gov.uk/hse/public/home.jsf>

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