LONDON FIRE BRIGADE

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The London Fire Commissioner is the fire and rescue authority for London

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To Whom It May Concern,

Following the recent fire at Notre-Dame de Paris, we are reminded of the many significant historic buildings we have here in London and the impact and devastation a fire can have on the building, its contents and our heritage. With this in mind, London Fire Brigade would like to take this opportunity to remind you of some important preventative and protective measures that can be taken within your own buildings.

The following advice is intended for individuals who live and/or work within buildings that have a historic significance, whereby the impact of a fire are a lot greater.

Fire Risk Assessment
It is a legal requirement to have a fire risk assessment. We would strongly recommend that this is carried out by a competent person who has an understanding of fire safety within heritage buildings. Whilst it does not strictly fall within the requirements of the risk assessment, salvage and damage control plans are also key aspects which should be fully considered. The legal requirement also requires that the fire risk assessment is regularly reviewed and kept up to date to make sure it is valid.

Staff Training
One of the key strategies to maintain a safe workplace and prevent fires from occurring in the first instance is by providing fire safety training for your staff. This is beneficial in reducing risk by ensuring employees are able to identify and reduce or eliminate fire hazards in their workplace.

It is important that all staff are aware of and familiar with, the buildings emergency plans and know what to do in the event of a fire. Their training should include what to do on discovery of a fire, how to raise and respond to an alarm and how to call the emergency services. Where appropriate, staff should take part in practice evacuations (fire drills) and become competent in them.

For members of staff provided with specific roles in an emergency, further training may be required, for example, investigating the source of the alarm, sweeping and searching the building for occupants, liaising with emergency services and ensuring that staff have a clear understanding of any specific roles & responsibilities. This could include out of hours procedures, such as, a pager/on-call system for responding.

It's beneficial that staff have an understanding of how the fire safety systems and equipment within the building operate. This can include fire extinguisher training, guidance on interpreting the fire alarm panel, operating smoke control systems, being aware of automatic fire suppression installations and the location of water/gas/electricity shut off valves. Staff should also have an awareness of any salvage/damage control plans and how to respond to them and what actions are required from them within any documents.

Fire safety training should be a continuous occurrence, from induction training of new staff, to regular refresher training for existing staff at suitable intervals, the frequency should be determined by your Fire Risk Assessment. Training will ensure staff remain familiar with the fire safety arrangements for the workplace and are aware of the procedures to be adhered to should a fire occur.

Hot works permit
A high level of control needs to be adhered to when hot works are carried out (after considering whether hot works are definitely necessary) as well as control of combustible materials in and around the potential area of works. If hot works are being carried out on site, ensure that conditions of the permit are followed e.g. fire fighting equipment is provided and that the area of hot works is monitored both during and after the works have finished to ensure that the risk of fire is eliminated. Key points to consider include the use of competent contractors and that appropriate risk assessments and method statements are in place to ensure that the relevant precautions have been identified and communicated to those involved.

House keeping amongst staff
The control of ignition sources needs to be scrutinised to minimise the risk of a fire starting in the first place. Points to consider include:

- Smoking and naked flames should be strictly controlled or eliminated
- Portable appliances are subject to regular testing/inspection and maintenance
- Assess the current lighting arrangements on site and consider using low voltage or LED lighting throughout the premises
- Consideration of additional control measures for restoration or preservation processes that could lead to self heating - also known as 'spontaneous combustion' – such as the use of linseed oils with cotton cloths
- Consideration to carrying out thermographic testing of electrical installations to identify areas of excessive resistive heat, emphasis should be given to consumer units

Close down procedures
Confirm the isolation of electrical and gas services is taking place before leaving the building.
In regards to waste management, make sure that bins are sited away from the external walls and consider providing CCTV as part of your arson prevention strategy.

Hidden voids (undetected)
Considerations should be given for the installation of detection in large void spaces and areas where there could be a chance of a fire going unnoticed for an extended period of time (particularly if the void contains a potential ignition source such as electrical joints or cables). Compartmentation surveys may need to be conducted to identify areas requiring remedial works – carry out fire stopping around cable and pipework penetrations. You could consider installing compartment walls, which would result in separating parts of the building to reduce risk.

Fire Doors
Well maintained and good fitting fire doors can greatly reduce the spread of fire by containing it within an area for a set period of time. This not only assists with the protection of the buildings and its contents but can also assist with fire fighting operations.
Where its not possible for modern fire doors to be fitted, its critical that any existing heritage doors are of solid construction, maintained in good conditions and fit well into their frame. There are many products available that allow an old historic fire door to be upgraded with materials/devices that will improve the doors resistance to heat, flame and smoke.

Automatic Fire Suppression Systems (AFSS)
Fires remain one of the greatest threats to our heritage buildings. An effective way to protect any property if a fire occurs is to consider installing AFSS as part of an appropriate package of mitigating fire safety measures. For historical sites, it's paramount to preserve historical accuracy and protect the structure's integrity and contents from fire.

AFSS is now becoming more frequently used as a compensatory feature in buildings where codes of practice cannot be complied with due to the construction and lay outs of these old buildings. It may be that items within your buildings are not removable, or so rare and valuable that AFSS can offer a solution.
AFSS comes in a range of different systems, from traditional Wet Sprinklers to Water Mist or a Gas Suppression System, each of which have their own benefits and limitations.

Salvage/Damage Control plan
A salvage plan is a document outlining the actions to take during an emergency. The aim is to ensure salvage operations are undertaken safely and that damage and long term deterioration of the building and its contents are minimised. The plan should be easy to read and readily identifiable and available on site by those who are authorised. It is advisable to have multiple laminated copies available on site, strategically placed to ensure they are accessible by fire crews in the event of an emergency. A salvage plan should contain information such as:

- Emergency contacts (including what happens out of hours and who to contact)
- A list of priority items including their locations and how to safely remove or these in situ (including information on any specialist tools needed)
- Large, easy to read floor plans to provide fire crews with an understanding of the layout of the building
- A location where any salvaged items should be removed to and any transportation needed
- Consider people that can be utilised to help implement the salvage plan and assist responding fire crews at all hours of the day
- Ensure adequate security measures are in place for any items removed from the premises

Please keep checking our heritage webpage over the next couple of months, which will soon include self help tools/templates and more.

For further information on fire safety within historic buildings and salvage planning, please contact the London Fire Brigade's Heritage Team at: heritage@london-fire.gov.uk

Yours faithfully,

Charlie Pugsley
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Directorate of Operations

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Attached: Guidance Note 80 Heritage and Buildings of Special Interest