

EMBARGO: 0001 hours
Thursday 21 October 2004

Sprinklers in schools should be a legal requirement says NUT

Britain's biggest teachers' union, the NUT, has launched a campaign to make it a legal requirement that all schools have sprinkler systems to help prevent the £100m a year of damage caused by fires.

As many as 20 schools a week are damaged or destroyed by arson with nine out of ten of these fires being started by pupils. The number of school fires rose by 55 per cent in 2003 with related costs increasing by more than 170 per cent over ten years.

The campaign, as part of European Health and Safety Week, has the backing of a wide range of organisations including the Fire Brigades Union, the Association of Chief Fire Officers and the Local Government Association*.

Currently only 150 of Britain's 28,000 schools are fitted with sprinklers as there is no legal requirement to do so. The Union initially wants a change in the law to require the installation of sprinklers in new schools and for this to be extended over time to existing schools regardless of age.

In the past, arson was generally a problem overnight but day time arson attacks when pupils are on the premises now make up a third of school fires. Insurance premiums for schools doubled between 2001 and 2003. Zurich Municipal, the main school fire insurer, says that it runs a 100 per cent loss on its school insurance business with large fires causing £100,000-plus of damage having risen by 55 per cent in 2003.

(Attached are details of recent fires including suspected cases of arson.)

The Government's £5.1 bn school building programme does not include a requirement that sprinklers should be installed in new buildings. However, the Deputy Prime Minister, John Prescott, is currently carrying out a review of building regulations covering schools.

Steve Sinnott, NUT General Secretary, said: "The Deputy Prime Minister's review of the regulations covering school buildings makes this the ideal time to put pressure on the Government for a change in the law.

"The threat of injury to pupils, teachers and other staff and firefighters is one aspect of the problem caused by fires in schools. But disruption to children's education frequently results.

"In secondary schools GCSE pupils' coursework can be damaged or lost altogether creating severe difficulties for those young people. In addition there is the loss of or damage to resources - books, equipment and materials - caused by fire.

“The financial loss of nearly £100m a year could be cut by 90 per cent if sprinklers were installed, the major insurer of schools tells us. That represents a substantial sum which could be better used. Lower insurance premiums could also bring further benefits to the pupils in our schools.

“It seems madness that a system which costs no more than 1.8 per cent of total building costs yet could bring such benefits is not already a requirement. The Deputy Prime Minister has an ideal opportunity to rectify this.”

As part of the campaign, the NUT is writing to the Deputy Prime Minister and other relevant Government ministers as well as chief education officers across the country.

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*Supporting organisations are:

- The Local Government Association
- The Fire Sprinkler Network
- The Association of Chief Fire Officers
- The Fire Brigades Union
- Zurich Municipal Insurance.
- The Arson Prevention Bureau

The following is a selection of examples of the problems faced by schools since June 1 this year.

Teenager rescued from school fire, 15/10 04:47 [read the article](#)

School fire arson fear, 14/10 16:36 [read the article](#)

Three crews at school fire, 08/10 12:00 [read the article](#)

Brigade tackles school fire, 10/02 08:27 [read the article](#)

Youths charged over school fire, 11/09 19:48 [read the article](#):

Damage slows school fire inquiry, 09/09 06:28 [read the article](#)

Probe into cause of school fire, 08/09 18:57 [read the article](#)

Fire school to be rebuilt, 19/07 22:03 [read the article](#)

Vandals start fires at school, 22/07 12:23 [read the article](#)

Boys in court for school fire, 16/07 13:05 [read the article](#)

North east and Cumbria: Arson capital?, 09/07 12:03 [read the article](#)

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