

Myth of the Month: Graduates are banned from throwing mortar boards



Read on to discover the reality...

This issue

In this issue we have drawn attention to the very dry weather conditions and the high risk of grass/heath land fires. As you walk about the University grounds you will notice how tinder dry the grass is underfoot. Even though it has rained during the past few days, extra care should still be taken.

Do you drive as part of your work duties? If so you need to read our revised Driving Standard. You should also make sure you have appropriate personal insurance.

Contents include:

- Fire Safety in the Great Outdoors**
- Driving for Work**
- Principal Investigator H&S responsibilities**
- New guidance for event organisers**
- OHSAS team changes**
- Got something sharp to throw away?**
- May Green Fair and Walking Challenge 2011**
- Hazardous substances: changes to labelling and safety data sheets**

Fire Safety in the great outdoors

Fire can strike with devastating effect at any time; some risks become more relevant in the summer. Fires can destroy huge areas of countryside and delicate ecosystems and have fatal results.

Grass fires: About 74,000 fires start on grass and heath land in Britain every year. Already at this time of very dry weather there have been heath land fires in the local area and it is even more important to ensure fire risks are kept as low as possible, especially in the University grounds.



Ensure cigarettes are extinguished properly. Don't leave bottles or glass in woodland – sunlight shining through glass can start fires (take them home and recycle them).

Don't attempt to tackle fires that can't be put out with a bucket of water – leave the area and report it to the fire and rescue service immediately.

Having a barbecue: Ensure the BBQ is stable and on even ground. Keep a bucket of water close by – just in case! Do not leave the BBQ unattended, especially if children or pets are around, or games are being played close by. For more information on summer fires go to the website <http://www.essex.ac.uk/ohsas>.

Driving for Work?

Driving is, in many cases, the most hazardous activity a person will undertake whilst at work. Unsafe drivers and vehicles put drivers, their passengers, pedestrians and other road users at risk, so it is important that the University has measures in place for driver and vehicle safety.



A new health and safety standard has just been published, covering employees who drive their own vehicle for work. It includes a generic risk assessment and guidance on driver and vehicle checks. There

is also information on a range of driver safety subjects, including personal safety, use of mobile phones and driving in the snow.

The new standard states that employees who use their vehicle for work need to drive safely whilst on University business and to have:

- a driving licence that is valid for driving in the UK,
- a roadworthy vehicle and
- personal vehicle insurance that covers them for driving for business.

Go to the website (www.essex.ac.uk/ohsas/Driving) for further information.

Hazardous Substances: changes to labelling and user information

An important part of chemical safety is clear information about any hazardous properties of a substance. Labels are being standardised to 'one chemical, one label – worldwide'. Hazard symbols will become pictograms and the colour changed. New hazard and precautionary statements **will** replace risk and safety phrases.



If you handle, use, store or transport hazardous substances, you may have seen changes to warning labels on products and Safety Data Sheets. Your COSHH assessments and methods of work may require review with any updates communicated to your team. For more information and a full list of new labels look at the website <http://www.essex.ac.uk/ohsas/hazsubs>.

What's New

OHSAS team changes

Lara Carmel, Occupational Health Adviser, joined the University in February and is already busy making changes to improve the Occupational Health Service. One of the changes we've made is to reorganise OHSAS into two discreet functions:

- the Occupational Health Service, managed by Lara
 - the Health and Safety Advisory Service (HSAS) managed by Claire Saunders, Head of Health and Safety
- This was necessary as part of Lara's plans to develop a quality service and obtain formal accreditation with the Faculty of Occupational Medicine.

There will continue to be strong collaborative working between us. Over time our website and documents will be amended to reflect the new structure. The web-link www.essex.ac.uk/OHSAS will continue to be used for now.

Eira Trafford: We are pleased to welcome Eira Trafford to the HSAS team. Eira will be working for us until the end of December, covering for Jo Carrington while she is on maternity leave.

Organising an Event?

For guidance on organising events safely check out our new website (at www.essex.ac.uk/ohsas/Events).

On the site you will find advice on risk assessment (including some generic risk assessments), fire safety and hiring contractors. There are also links to a range of further information. Don't forget to contact HSAS in good time if you need fire or health and safety advice.



Reporting health and safety incidents

We've shortened our health and safety incident report form, to make reporting an incident quicker and easier. You'll find the new form at:

www.essex.ac.uk/ohsas/hsincident/Report.htm. Help us to help make the University a safer workplace by reporting accidents, incidents and unsafe events promptly.

Myth of the month:



The Myth: Graduates are banned from throwing mortar boards

The Reality: Health and safety law doesn't stop graduates having fun and celebrating their success in the time-honoured fashion!

The chance of being injured by a flying mortar board is incredibly small, and when the concern is actually about the

hats being returned in good condition, it's time to stop blaming health and safety.

Got something sharp to throw away?

A recent incident where a cleaner was injured by a sharp object that had been discarded into a bin has highlighted the importance of safe disposal. Sharp objects should be placed into a thick container; padded Jiffy bag or thick envelope, which should be sealed and clearly labelled, e.g. 'Broken glass'. Keep the container separate from all other rubbish, and arrange for a cleaner to safely remove and dispose of it. (NB: Biological Sciences staff should use the designated red glass waste bins.)

May Green Fair and the Walking Challenge 2011

The University's inaugural May Green Fair took place on Wednesday 4 May, where students and staff discovered more about the University's many green, sustainable and wellbeing initiatives. Bicycles were checked and tagged and some 20 recycled bicycles were sold, with proceeds going to the charity Re-cycle. Among the other stalls were a tasty locally-sourced BBQ, a Recycling Challenge and a few local environmental charities.



The Walking Challenge 2011 was launched at the Fair to highlight how walking is a healthy alternative to driving into work if you live close enough. Over 100 pedometers were given away and pledges to walk more often were made. Mini health checks were completed by NHS professionals and lots of walking and cycling information was given out. To access local walking maps and information visit www.essex.ac.uk/transport/walking.

Policy update: Principal Investigator health and safety responsibilities

Health and Safety Committee recently approved some updates to the University's Health, Safety and Wellbeing Policy. The most significant change is to clarify that Principal Investigators are responsible for the health and safety management of their research projects. This includes risk assessment and the safety of research staff and students on the project. The full Health Safety and Wellbeing Policy can be found at www.essex.ac.uk/ohsas/HSpolicy.htm

Principal investigators who are unsure of what they need to do to meet their responsibilities should seek advice from their lead health and safety adviser.