

Fire safety in food technology classrooms

Recently, there have been at least two incidents where fires have occurred in food technology classrooms.

Actions for schools

Schools are reminded to continue to:

- Ensure that class teachers double check that any gas or electric cooking equipment is turned off after use and that nothing combustible is left on top of cookers, hobs, etc.
- Ensure that cooking is not left unattended.
- Ensure that ovens, hobs, cooker hoods, extractor fans and grills are kept clean. Built up fat and grease can ignite and cause fires.
- Check that toasters are clean and not placed under kitchen cabinets or close to anything that can catch fire.
- Ensure that no one puts anything metallic in microwaves.
- Ensure that pupils are suitably supervised.
- Use spark devices (where required) to light gas cookers. They are much safer than matches or lighters since they don't have a naked flame and are generally safer around children also.
- Be fabric aware. Loose clothing can easily catch fire, so staff and pupils to take care not to lean over a hot hob, and always keep tea towels and cloths away from the cooker and hob.
- Ensure that the school has a valid fire risk assessment in place and that any remedial work has been completed as required.
- Ensure that lesson-based risk assessments are in place.
- Ensure that annual fire awareness training for all school staff is conducted and is up to date.

Additional guidance

Remote power shutdown in an emergency

Passive fire protection is important to ensure that the layout of a kitchen helps prevent fire as well as aiding attempts to contain fire and make the area safe. If a fire starts, it is crucial that the power or gas supply is able to be shutdown remotely, to make the situation safer for Fire and Rescue Services and avert a potentially far worse situation. Kitchens should be compartmentalised to enable at least 30 minutes fire resistance. Well maintained fire doors with intumescent strips and smoke seals should be installed where appropriate.

All surfaces should be kept clean and tidy

It goes without saying that to ensure fire safety, kitchens should be kept clean. Special attention must be paid to keep areas free of oil and grease. Build-up of grease inside cookers and oven tops can lead to a fire, so regular cleaning of ovens and equipment is essential. Kitchens should be a tidy environment, without any clutter that could block exits and prevent escape in an emergency. All waste cooking oil should also be disposed of properly and not be left on the premises for longer than is necessary.

Never leave cooking unattended

The golden rule in preventing both domestic and non-domestic kitchen fires is to always pay attention to what one is doing. If for any reason cooking must be left unattended, it is important that all staff are instructed to turn off appliances and take pans off the heat. Even if someone is away for a moment, it is better to be safe than sorry.

Have firefighting equipment on hand

If best attempts to prevent a fire from starting in a kitchen fail, then having the right equipment to extinguish any flames can make the difference between an inconvenient mess and a ruined classroom. Special fire extinguishers for Class F cooking fires are essential for commercial kitchens and fire blankets are handy for smaller pan fires. All staff should be trained in the proper use of firefighting equipment and know when a fire can be dealt with safely and when it's best to just get out.

Additional reading

- [Fire safety in new and existing school buildings](#)
- [Building Bulletin 100: design for fire safety in schools](#)
- [Schools fire safety guidance](#) (pdf) April 2021

Related content

[Fire safety](#)

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