

ATL - installation of sprinklers should be legal requirement

Tue, 03 Apr 07 | Campaign Organisation Press Release

Summary

The Association of Teachers and Lecturers has released the results of a new survey which has revealed that 52 per cent of school fires over the past five years were a result of arson. Almost 50 per cent of respondents who reported fires said that their school had suffered structural damage, with 3 per cent of schools being completely destroyed.

Speaking at ATL's annual conference in Bournemouth, Dr Mary Bousted, general secretary of ATL, said: 'Whilst the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) consults on whether to make sprinklers mandatory, our members' lives, and those of their pupils, are being put at risk. The recent announcement by the DfES regarding risk assessments is a step in the right direction. They are a valid tool in our health and safety work, however whilst we appreciate that schools and colleges in socially deprived areas may be at a greater risk of being destroyed by arson than those in rural areas, arson is not the only cause of fires.'

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Tuesday 3 April 2007 embargoed to 11.30 hours on 3 April 2007

Installation of sprinklers should be a legal requirement in all new-build and school and college refurbishments - ATL survey

52% of school fires over the last 5 years were as a result of arson, according to a survey released today by the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL).

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Speaking at ATL's annual conference in Bournemouth, Dr Mary Bousted, general secretary of ATL, said: "Whilst the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) consults on whether to make sprinklers mandatory, our members' lives, and those of their pupils, are being put at risk.

"The recent announcement by the DfES regarding risk assessments is a step in the right direction. They are a valid tool in our health and safety work, however whilst we appreciate that schools and colleges in socially deprived areas may be at a greater risk of being destroyed by arson than those in rural areas, arson is not the only cause of fires.

"Fires can start anywhere and for a many reasons, and ATL believes that a commitment to adequate funding is required to ensure that all teachers, lecturers, support staff and their pupils are protected against the danger and destruction caused by fire, irrespective of the school or college and area they work in the UK.

"ATL is calling on the Government to make it a legal requirement for sprinklers to be installed in all new-build and school and college refurbishments, and to provide adequate funding to alleviate already overstretched local authority budgets."

In support of an ATL annual conference resolution, 73% of education professionals who responded to the survey back the mandatory installation of sprinklers.

A teacher at Thornden School, Hampshire, which was set on fire said: "A large part of the main school building was destroyed and smoke damage occurred in a significant part of the rest of the building, forcing complete closure for 2 weeks and major inconvenience for much longer."

Craig McCartney, a teacher at Copleston High School, Suffolk, which suffered a recent fire added:

"Students who set fire to our school caused nearly one million damage, but delay and shortfall between the fire and rebuild means we have had no staffroom for eighteen months, which is causing major stress for our two hundred staff. LEAs need emergency contingencies to fast track claims and match funding."

ENDS

Note to editors:

1. The Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) surveyed a cross-section of education professionals in schools in the UK between 20 and 27 March 2007. 562 members responded.

2. ATL is launching a School Fires campaign poster at 11.30am on Tuesday 3 April outside the Purbeck Hall entrance of the Bournemouth International Centre (BIC), Beacon Road/West Cliff promenade. Dr Mary Bousted, general secretary of ATL, Phil Abraham, Station Manager at Westbourne Fire Station and crew will be in attendance.

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