Marquees, other tents and similar structures

Introduction

The construction of marquees, other tents and similar structures used for social/public or academic events render these structures vulnerable to fire. To ensure the safest use of these structures, this guidance outlines the responsibilities and duties to enable the Responsible Person (RP) to comply with Fire Safety requirements and best practice.

Responsibilities

Event Organiser

The event organiser will be responsible for the temporary structure for the period that it is erected for. Should this prove to be impractical, then a deputy shall be nominated who is available to be the primary role for safety management and supervision, particularly in the event of an emergency.

In addition, the event organiser is to liaise with the Fire Safety Adviser for advice on proposed locations and fire safety measures which will need to be introduced for the proposed use.

Fire Safety Adviser

The University Fire Safety Adviser (FSA) is appointed to support event organisers in delivering a fire safe environment.

Fire Safety Management

Selection of marquees, tents and similar temporary structures

When sourcing marquees, tents and similar temporary structures, materials and liners should be inherently fire retardant. The material, panels and liners shall have a label or certification affixed to provide details of fire-retardant properties and relevant BS/EN or international equivalent standards.

The approved suppliers are Fews Marquees Ltd and Relocatable Ltd. Their contact details can be found here: https://warwick.ac.uk/services/finance/procurement_and_insurance/approved_suppliers/currentcontracts/temporarystructures

Siting and layout

The site should be clear of hazards; and, in particular provide easy access and ample open space for all the occupants of the tent(s) to get clear to a place of safety in the event of fire. Spacing between marquees, and between tents and other similar type structures, shall be not less than 6 metres.
Where marquees are to be sited in close proximity (within 6 metres) to a permanent building, this will have a considerable effect on the fire safety arrangements for both structures. In such circumstances, consultation with the Fire Safety Adviser is required.

Special care is to be taken when tentage is used for entertainment or exhibition purposes. Under no circumstances are tents or marquees to be directly attached to permanent buildings. If direct access from permanent buildings is required, a covered walkway is to be provided, terminating at least 1 metre from the building.

The site must be arranged to allow for adequate means of access for firefighting appliances to within 45 metres of any part of the structure. Access routes shall be not less than 4 metres wide, have no overhead structure or cables less than 4.5 metres above the ground, and shall be capable of taking the weight (about 14 tonnes) of firefighting appliances in all weathers.

Emergency vehicle access routes within the site shall be kept clear of obstruction at all times.

Grass shall be cut as short as possible before the erection of tents is commenced, and cuttings should be cleared away to a safe place.

Access to hydrants and other water supplies shall not be obstructed or obscured.

**MEANS OF ESCAPE**

All tables, seating, stalls, props and equipment must be sited to ensure that a clear path of sufficient width is maintained at all times.

Opening flaps in the perimeter wall of the marquee are not acceptable as an alternative to exit doors, as past experience has shown these to be inadequate. However, open sides or large areas of open side may be considered acceptable.

The required minimum width of any final exit in relation to the number of occupants who may have to use it should be determined by table below:

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<th>Minimum clear width of exit</th>
<th>No’ of Exits</th>
<th>Number of persons</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.05 metres</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.05 metres</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.50 metres</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.95 metres</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>400</td>
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An additional 10cm should be added to the exit width for every 20 persons.
An allowance must be made for the fact that one exit may be obstructed and not available because of fire, smoke or other hazards. Exits located within a 45 degree radius should be regarded as one exit for the purpose of calculating the number of exits required. The distance of travel from any point should not exceed 18 metres.

Exit routes, both internal and external, must be maintained free of all obstructions caused by the superstructure of the marquee, temporary fixings, etc. Furthermore, where a change of level has to be negotiated on any exit route, easygoing ramps shall be provided (in preference to steps) with a maximum gradient of 1:12.

Illuminated safety signage shall be provided above each of the exits. All fire safety signs shall comply with current regulations for safety signs.

NOTICES

Pictorial notices must be used, to provide the following:

- instructions on how to use any fire safety equipment.
- the actions to be taken in the event of fire; and
- where to assemble

All signs and notices should be positioned so that they can be easily seen and understood.

LIGHTING ARRANGEMENTS

The normal lighting should adequately illuminate all internal and external routes of exit and be switched on at all times during the event when natural lighting is insufficient. Naked flames are not to be used as a means of illumination.

Where necessary, emergency escape lighting shall be provided throughout the covered areas and if necessary to those parts of the site outside the marquee which form exit routes. Advice on this can be obtained from the Fire Safety Adviser.

FIRE WARNING ARRANGEMENTS

Where identified in a risk assessment and in consultation with the Fire Safety Adviser; a fire alarm system, incorporating facilities for public address, shall be provided throughout the area. The system shall come into operation on the actuation of any fire alarm call point, the positions of which are to be agreed with the Fire Safety Adviser. The alarm signal must consist of a distinct tone of not more than five seconds duration and audible over the public address system.

For certain uses which take place in small to moderate size structures, a simpler type of fire alarm system may be acceptable.

The fire alarm system should be tested daily before the event commences.

Fire Alarm cables shall be fixed in position and where necessary protected against mechanical damage.
A suitable means and location for summoning emergency services should be identified prior to the event and should be readily available at all material times. The fire services should be called immediately to every outbreak of fire. Instructions as to the location of and the method of calling the fire brigade should be prominently displayed.

**FIREFIGHTING EQUIPMENT**

Suitable fire extinguishers shall be provided and evenly distributed throughout the marquee area. The precise positions for these should be determined after discussion with the Fire Safety Adviser when the marquee is being erected. Suitable fire extinguishers shall be provided and sited adjacent to the main electrical switchgear and any fuel sources for the marquee.

Fire blankets shall be provided in a prominent position (where possible) within any food preparation area, where cooking takes place.

**HEATING AND COOKING**

Any form of heating or cooking to be provided within the structure must be agreed with the Fire Safety Adviser. Cooking appliances should be positioned clear of tent walls, roofs and other combustible materials and supervised at all times. They should not be left unattended whilst in use.

**DECORATIONS**

Combustible decorations are to be restricted to a minimum. Decorations shall not be positioned where they may ignite or materially increase the fire hazard. In particular, all decorations shall be positioned with due regard to means of escape routes.

**ELECTRICAL INSTALLATIONS**

All electrical wiring and apparatus shall comply with the 'Requirements for Safety' cited by the IEE 'Regulations for the Electrical Equipment of Buildings (Temporary Installations); and, so far as possible, be clear of canvas and positioned where it cannot be tampered with.

All electrical installations are to be installed by qualified and competent persons.

If generators are used, they should be positioned at a safe distance outside the marquee.

**SECURITY ARRANGEMENTS**

The event organiser shall carry out a thorough check of the whole area shall be made to ensure that nothing that may present a fire hazard remains and the facility is secure from unauthorised access and arson.

With the exception of authorised essential systems that must continue to operate after normal working hours, all electrical appliances and lighting systems are to be switched off and disconnected by nominated person.
PLANNED PREVENTATIVE MAINTENACE

For Marquees which are erected over a period of 1 week; are planned to remain for a substantial period of time and have fire safety systems will require periodic inspection and testing. The event organiser will therefore need to liaise with the Estates Maintenance Team to ensure suitable testing regimes are in place for the period of the erection of the marquee

RISK ASSESSMENT

It is the responsibility of the event organiser to evaluate, remove, reduce and protect from risk to their staff, exhibitors and by the public by completing a risk assessment.

Marquee structures, doors, linings, heaters, cookers, generators, stored fuel, toilets, public access, stake heads, ropes and floorings, to name a few, all have risks particularly with regard to fire.

The risk assessment that you must carry out will help you ensure that your fire safety procedures, fire prevention measures, and fire precautions (plans, systems and equipment) are all in place and working properly, and the risk assessment should identify any issues that need attention.

Risk Assessment templates and further guidance can be found here

Any further information or support can be obtained from the University Fire Safety Adviser

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Owner: Fire Safety Adviser

Source Location: M:\SF\OCH 2006\Fire Safety\09-Administration\04-Policy_Guidance_Work Instructions

Published Location: https://warwick.ac.uk/services/healthsafetywellbeing/guidance/fire/fire_safety/

Authorised By: Senior H&S Adviser

Approval Date: 04/11/2021

Review date: 01/11/2022