

IOSH  
 Fire Risk Management Group  
 Seminar #1  
 Complacency When the Evacuation Alarm is Initiated  
 Case study

Background	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Backwater Estates is a privately owned company that rents out space in a building to twenty different small enterprises and is located southwest of London.</li> <li>• The number of employees in each enterprise ranges from eight to twenty-five.</li> <li>• The Backwater Estates building was refurbished ten years ago from an old brick factory that manufactured textiles.</li> <li>• The building is managed by a private company that takes care of building maintenance and oversees fire safety including fire protection systems.</li> </ul>
Fire protection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Backwater Estates oversees fire protection in the building including the maintenance of extinguishers, the sprinkler system, the alarm system, emergency lighting, as well as the fire and exit doors. The company takes its responsibility for fire safety seriously. Although there are fire extinguishers and fire hoses, no one is trained in their use.</li> <li>• The sprinkler system is dated but it is continually maintained.</li> <li>• During the refurbishment smoke and carbon monoxide detectors were installed and, along with the sprinkler system, linked into a common alarm system.</li> <li>• A number of offices on the top three floors have kitchens with refrigerators, microwave ovens, teakettles and coffee machines.</li> <li>• The ground and first floors house a lighting supply company and several artisanal workshops including a jewelry workshop, a large pottery workshop with an operational kiln to glaze the pottery.</li> <li>• There is a common waste, recycling area behind the building.</li> <li>• There is continued vigilance to ensure that all escape routes are clear and unobstructed.</li> </ul>
Alarm tests and evacuation drills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is a scheduled and announced test of the fire alarm bell on the second and fourth Friday of every month at 10:00 in the morning,</li> <li>• There is one partial and one full evacuation drill a year, however most people find reasons not to participate.</li> </ul>
Alarm activation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On the average, about every forty-five days, smoke from one of the workshops or an unclean toaster triggers a smoke detector and the evacuation alarm.</li> </ul>
Participation in evacuation	<p>Although, when the refurbishing was completed and the building was commissioned to its current use ten years ago, everyone would evacuate to the emergency assembly area, today, during alarms and drills less than 30 of the 150 occupants could be bothered to evacuate.</p>

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Group work instructions:	You will have 15 minutes for this exercise. At each table try to develop consensus on the four questions below. Once decided note your response to each question on a flipchart. Ask one person at the table to present your group's findings.
Discussion during group work	Discuss the following questions:  1. Why are people complacent? _____ _____  2. What can we do about it? _____ _____  3. What are the obstacles to getting it done and how can we work around the obstacles? _____ _____  4. What steps can we, as occupational safety and health practitioners immediately implement to diminish this complacency? _____ _____ _____
Your notes from the summary of the group work	