

News Release

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Amax Security's fire solutions for Kennedy Institute of Rheumatology

Fast expanding security and fire systems installer Amax Security has helped the Kennedy Institute of Rheumatology to adapt its fire protection system, as part of the Institute's significant reorganisation and updating of its facilities in Hammersmith, west London. The move, overseen by Building Manager Les Payne, has significantly improved operational efficiency within the Institute, which carries out valuable work in researching and developing cures for rheumatic diseases.

Amax, which offers a flexible one-stop service to residential and commercial customers, has worked with Les and his team to supply and maintain fire extinguishers in place of the fire sprinkler system and hose reels previously used throughout the 4000ft² building.

Les explains that areas within the Institute's building, previously used for purposes including storage and as linen rooms used to require a sprinkler system for fire protection. But their conversion for uses such as a microscope room, IT hardware and communications equipment operation meant a different approach was needed. The release of water could cause costly damage to such equipment, while in other areas such as the lower ground floor, where chest freezer cabinets are kept, it might also harm 20 years' worth of refrigerated laboratory samples. Having consulted the Institute's insurers, as well as Hammersmith & Fulham Fire Brigade, Les called in Amax to implement a new strategy.

To keep its options open, depending on future usage requirements, the Institute's sprinkler system was mothballed and capped off, while existing wall-mounted hose reels were removed to avoid the potential for water damage from their use. A number of existing fire extinguishers were previously kept within laboratory areas and George Melpous, who heads up Amax's fire systems division, advised their relocation to new positions immediately outside the entry/exit doors.

"We realised that with large areas like this, which contain flammable and potentially carcinogenic materials such as plastic storage boxes, that we needed to remove the temptation for staff and students to fight any fire with extinguishers lying immediately to hand," George explains. "The danger is that a fire could quickly develop and cut off exit routes, leaving people trapped inside, so we've placed extinguishers in the corridors to avoid this. However, in a few areas, such as plant rooms, the generator room and main switch room, we've kept extinguishers adjacent to machinery for

immediate deployment since there's much less risk of being trapped here. This also pays dividends if, for example, a motor starts to run hot and begins smoking – we can use a CO2 extinguisher to quickly cool it down and prevent a fire occurring.”

A range of fire extinguishers – mainly CO2, as well as powder and foam – has been installed, with a total of around 100 extinguishers providing full protection throughout the building. Indeed, the Institute building's corridors are conspicuous by their coverage of wall and floor mounted units. All are clearly marked, with accompanying wall signage indicating building escape routes. “You can never have enough extinguishers,” Les comments, “because if a serious incident occurs it's essential to deal with it effectively. “You don't want to find yourself short of resources, because lives may be in danger.”

Amax's service includes an annual maintenance check service, along with ongoing advice on deployment of extinguishers when a change of use occurs within rooms at the Institute's building. In the event of a fire developing, Les Payne's team are provided with pre-warning from a combination of smoke detectors, ionisation heads and heat sensors. This equipment can flag up problems such as faulty detector heads, preventing unnecessary disruption. Alerts are sounded via the electronic building management system and in the event of the main fire alarm system's activation a coordinated response would also involve security officers from the neighbouring hospital attending to lend assistance.

Precautionary moves

Supplementing the integrated fire protection measures, Les Payne's team has taken a variety of precautions to help minimise the possibility of fire breaking out around the building. These include reducing the risk of gas cylinders – containing argon, compressed air, oxygen and carbon dioxide – from exploding by piping gas to manifold points where possible. An on-site nitrogen generator also removes the need for storage of up to three or four gas bottles per laboratory, with resulting space benefits too.

Areas within the building are allocated three levels of access control, according to their risk level, with the highest category requiring an initial induction process for any permitted staff and subsequent supervised visits at all times. Electronic proximity cards control door entry and provide a computerised reporting system, enabling an accurate roster to be quickly produced of staff and students within the building at any one time, in case of fire evacuation. Elsewhere, parts of the building such as plant and machine rooms are only accessible by maintenance staff, cutting down on the risk of others becoming trapped there in the event of an emergency.

Regular fire safety training for all those working on-site includes live demonstrations on how to select and operate extinguishers and related procedures include the appointment of dedicated fire wardens (two for each floor of the building) and fire coordinators.

Client liaison

Amax Security's George Melpous, who heads up the company's fire systems division, has overseen the installation of fire extinguishers at the Kennedy Institute of Rheumatology's Sunley building. Building Manager Les Payne has high praise for the

work George does: “George is an excellent engineer who works very hard for us and is dedicated to our needs. He’s so reliable that we trust him with keys to the building during the times he is on-site and he doesn’t miss a trick.

“We find Amax Security’s pricing to be good and George provides us with a full report on all his actions so that we know what he’s found on visits such as our annual fire extinguisher maintenance check. At other times, he’s on-hand to give us good advice that I can rely on. George is a real credit to Amax Security and gets a score of 20 out of 10 from me!”

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