

Ionising radiation

This article is about the information that school science departments working with radioactive materials should pass on to their employers. In state schools the employer is the local authority and in independent schools the employer is the board of governors. In both cases we suggest informing your senior management team, who act on behalf of the employer.

The documents, forms and checklist mentioned in this article can be accessed from the Ionising Radiation pages of our [website](#). You will require to be logged in.

Last year, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) began inspecting schools to check whether or not their use and storage of radioactive materials complied with the Ionising Radiations Regulations 2017. We have been informed that these inspections are to continue. The inspections highlighted the roles of staff, the employer and SSERC.

- Staff are legally obliged to follow their employer's health and safety guidance.
- SSERC, acting on behalf of the employer, produces guidance on safe, legal work with radioactive materials in schools. A member of staff at SSERC holds the HSE-recognised Radiation Protection Adviser qualification. We will be writing about Radiation Protection Advisers in the near future.
- The employer should ensure that this guidance is being followed.

Since the inspections began, many employers have become more proactive regarding this last point. They may well ask to see everything you have concerning working with ionising radiation and that's their prerogative. The following is what we consider to be the minimum you should pass on to them if you are taking the initiative.

Tell them that you are working with radioactive materials

It is possible that they do not know. It is also possible that, when you tell them, they may be full of misconceptions about the risks and benefits. SSERC has plenty of material about this, including an article about radiation dose in [Bulletin 278](#) that puts things into perspective.

Tell them the name of the supervisory member of staff

This will be someone who has had direct training from SSERC within the last five years (either face-to-face or online). Their role is ensuring that SSERC's guidance on working with ionising radiation is being followed

in the school, though the ultimate responsibility is the employer's. Your SMT should be aware that if this member of staff leaves this role needs to be filled.

Pass on your staff training records

All staff who work with radioactive materials should be trained. With the exception of the supervisory person mentioned above, this can be inhouse, though we do love for as many of you as possible to join us on courses. HSE may in the future wish to know how many people work with radioactive sources and giving your employer a copy of training records is a good way to help them to do this.

Pass on your stocklist and tell them the location of your storage cabinet

This information will be required by the member of SMT who liaises with the Fire and Rescue Service. Your stocklist should consist solely of items approved by SSERC. Our document 'Working with radioactive materials in schools' tells you what you can and cannot keep.

Pass on your completed checklist

Download the checklist from our website. You should be able to tick all the relevant boxes and if you can, you and your employer can be content that you are following SSERC's guidance.

Radon

Your employer should have carried out a radon risk assessment at each workplace. It is not the responsibility of the member of staff who supervises work with radioactive material in the science department to do this, nor is it an area covered by SSERC. Having said that, there was a recent case in England where an independent school was prosecuted for ignoring this requirement.

If you work in an independent school in Scotland you might mention the radon situation to your employer to ensure they are aware. SSERC cannot give comprehensive advice, but we can support employers taking the first steps.