# Introduction

Concerns have been raised that the removal of telephone landlines and physical phones (handsets) and replacing them with Teams telephony may pose a health and safety risk.

These concerns include potential delays in calling the emergency services in an emergency due to:

* users having to log in to their laptops before making a call.
* the need to go to find someone able to make a call for them.
* visitors to campus not being able to use UoA systems (no login or Teams telephony).
* individuals not being able to use laptops due to the activity they are doing (handling chemicals, biological risks, using equipment, wearing personal protective equipment etc.) and so needing to use a physical device in the vicinity of the work – some of which may be high risk.
* internet based telephony being perceived as less reliable than a landline (e.g. in the event of a power failure).

# Legal Considerations

There is nothing in general health and safety legislation which describes specific requirements for the type of communication system, only that *“Every employer shall ensure that any necessary contacts with external services are arranged, particularly as regards first-aid, emergency medical care and rescue work”[[1]](#footnote-1).*

However, there are requirements for things like emergency telephones in passenger lifts etc. and that activities are risk assessed and risks controlled as far as is reasonably practicable.

# Guidance on the Health and Safety Risks

In most locations, during normal working hours there will be staff present who have a laptop or desktop and are logged in, or who can do, and call the emergency services without a significant delay.

In **classrooms**, staff will have access to Creston panels or phones in addition to Teams telephony, and so will be able to summon assistance on behalf of students and visitors to whom they owe a duty of care.

The emergency phones in **lifts** are being retained and so will remain available in case of breakdown or entrapment.

Landlines are being retained for phones in the communal areas and stairwells in University Student **Halls of Residence** and so will be available to use in an emergency by residents and their visitors.

Similarly, they will be retained in other **bookable spaces** and spaces used by visitors where staff may not be available nearby.

In some “**High Risk Spaces”** it may be justified to retain a physical handset in the vicinity which is accessible in an emergency. Valid justifications may include that:

1. Because of the nature of the work activity, it is not practical to have a laptop or similar in the vicinity (due to the use of chemicals, biological hazards, radiation sources, a very hot, wet or potentially explosive atmosphere) to have a laptop nearby and accessible.
2. Because of the Personal Protective Equipment which needs to be worn to carry out the activity it would be difficult to use Teams telephony or would require removal of the PPE to do so, which would increase the risk to the user (e.g. gloves).

In these circumstances a handset will be needed in the vicinity, but not always in the same room. It may be possible to have this in an anteroom and shared by adjacent labs for example. However, there will also be circumstances where it will need to be in the same lab, e.g. a containment lab where leaving the room in an emergency might risk release of a biological or chemical agent and put others at risk.

**Lone working**,whether during normal working hours or out of hours, poses an additional risk. This should be risk assessed and consideration given to how the alarm may be raised if the individual has an accident or suffers a medical issue (especially if they have a known disability or condition). A number of options can be appropriate to reduce the risk including mobile phones, [SafeZone](https://www.abdn.ac.uk/toolkit/services/safezone/), and lone worker applications (on private or work devices) or dedicated devices. Radios are another potential option in some cases.

Both staff and students are encouraged to download SafeZone to enable them to contact Security or call the emergency services quickly and easily.

**Mobile Phones** are now carried by almost everyone and can likely be used to call the emergency services, even where signal strength is low and other applications cannot be used. They will also usually operate if there is a local power failure, unless it is a large one which affects the mobile phone network. They are, therefore, a useful and usually very reliable alternative to other telephony systems.

Note: **Landlines** in the UK are in the process of converting from hard wired cabling and physical telephone exchanges to internet telephony, and so there will soon be no difference in reliability of the telephone network even if you have a traditional landline.

The **Fire Alarms** in most University buildings are linked to Security so the alarm is raised automatically and will be investigated to see if it is a false alarm or a fire. Staff are encouraged to contact Security to tell them if they know the fire alarm activation is due to a real fire, or to tell them of an accidental activation (e.g. broken call point) if they know this for sure, but not before making sure they are safe first.

1. [Regulation 9 of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/1999/3242/regulation/9/made). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)