

# Should the law insist on silent fire alarms?

Twitter is a great medium for us newshounds. It can point us in the direction of good stories as well as good people to know.

We came across Edinburgh photographer, James Christie, a couple of months back through the medium of Twitter and we know him to be both sincere as well as a bit controversial from the range of his extensive tweets. His tweets this week have highlighted what he sees as a potential problem in the existing fire regulations in Scotland, and one which he thinks may have dire consequences. The problem is that the regulations as they stand do not appear to include the requirement to have a visible warning of fire as well as an audible one. So we asked James to put his pen to email paper and tell us a little more. This is what James writes:-

*I have experience in the Fire/Life Safety business from my time in Los Angeles. One of the horrific differences that jumped out at me on my return to Edinburgh was the lack (non existent in most cases) of strobe lights as part of the fire alarm system in publicly accessible buildings including, but not limited to, Libraries, Government buildings, Sports Centres, Hotels, B&Bs, Restaurants, Shopping Centres, Shops, etc...you get the picture.*

*Why are strobes so important I hear you ask? Good question...the answer is simple. Deaf people cannot hear sirens, horns or bells...therefore a visual alert MUST be in place. It astounded me on my return to the UK in 2004 that this had not been written into law....after all what price do you place on human life, right?*

*I have spoken to Lothian & Borders Fire Services and they*

*have confirmed to me that there is no such legislation in the UK and I have to confess that I am mortified by that news. Now...if that legislation was brought to law then a conservative estimate on Edinburgh's publicly accessed buildings (alone) would be that less than 5% have strobes.*

*A change to the law needs to be brought into effect without delay and those failing to comply should have their buildings/premises closed until strobes are fitted.*

*Do you know that in a metropolis as big as Los Angeles, they didn't mandate for sprinklers in commercial buildings until 1974...after a major disaster in a high-rise building (and resultant loss of life).... Must we in the UK await a similar disaster before mandating strobe lights?*

*The current situation discriminates against deaf people in the UK and may actually be a violation of human rights.*

The Edinburgh Reporter spoke to LBFRS and a spokeswoman there said:-

“The means for alerting the occupiers of a premises to a fire situation is determined by the outcomes of a mandatory fire safety risk assessment which is a requirement of the Fire (Scotland) Act 2005. This risk assessment should take into consideration any sensory impairments occupiers may have. It should also take into account any level of background noise.

“The legislation seeks to ensure the safety of people (whether they are employees, visitors or others) in premises from the harm of fire, by setting out detailed fire safety responsibilities, including sector or business specific information.

“Further information is available from <http://www.infoscotland.com/firelaw>.”

We also spoke to Councillor for Craigentiny and Duddingston,

Ewan Aitken about this matter and he said:-“”Lothian and Borders Fire Brigade have been very active in putting smoke alarms in thousands of homes but without strobes, those who are deaf are still at risk. I have written to the fire master asking him to say how he could provide this much needed life saving device to those who need it.”

Do you own or work in commercial premises in Edinburgh where there are strobe lights already fitted? If you do, then perhaps you could let us know about it? [theedinburghreporter@gmail.com](mailto:theedinburghreporter@gmail.com) or

You may follow both [James Christie](#) and [LBFRS](#) on Twitter