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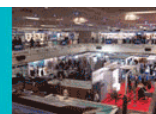
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Wed, Jan 12, 2011 3:00 PM

Student protests show importance of glass safety regulations

By: Ian Penfold, Safety Film Specialist at Solar Gard UK
 Posted: Wednesday, January 12, 2011 8:35 am



In the most part, a single photograph depicted the recent student protests in London. The moment a rioting student kicked in a window at Millbank Tower adorned most newspaper front-pages to illustrate the impact of this violent demonstration.

Most observers will regard this as an act of reckless vandalism. However, to any business premise owner up to date on his or her legal obligations, the image of how the broken glass actually stayed relatively intact after being attacked tells another story.

The remarkable fact is, despite press coverage being full of reports of broken glass, no one was seriously injured or killed by a lethal shard of glass. This was not down to luck. It was down to a micro-thin technology that all architects and installers should be aware of – safety window film.

Ever since 1992, when Health, Safety and Welfare Regulation 14 came into force, business premise owners have been required to ensure that “every window or other transparent or translucent surface in a wall, partition, door or gate should, where necessary for reasons of health or safety, be of a safety material or be protected against breakage of the transparent or translucent material; and be appropriately marked or incorporate features to make it apparent.”

This regulation, designed to protect building occupants as well as passersby, applies to a wide range of workplaces including offices, shops, schools, hospitals, hotels and places of entertainment.

In other words, the business owner is responsible for keeping their glass safe, or they could be held liable and face legal consequences if someone gets hurt or killed due to poor safety practices. The cost implications of this, for many businesses, could be catastrophic.



Further threats to glass windows

The use of glass in offices, restaurants and shops is on the increase as architects seek to bring natural environmental factors into the interior of buildings by making the most of natural daylight. But with this increased usage comes an increased risk, and it's not just rioters who break windows.

Last year the media reported the death of a young man who died after cutting himself when he threw his girlfriend through the front window of a well-known high street retailer. The

danger posed by the glass was probably avoidable had government regulations been followed. Many of us will also have seen the newspaper photographs of the windowpane that fell dozens of stories onto Old Broad Street, narrowly missing passersby.

With the London 2012 Olympics around the corner, let's also not forget the growing threat of terrorism - almost 90 percent of all injuries from a bomb blast are related to flying glass, rather than the blast itself. In an explosion, glass particles can travel at speeds of up to 150 mph. If, for example, a bomb explodes 400 metres away from a building, glass from a broken window can hit a person, 5 metres away, at a speed of 75 metres per second. In this scenario, glass particles of any size, even from strengthened windows that are designed to shatter into small pieces, are unquestionably lethal.

The risk of an explosion does not apply solely to large cities. The Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) now advises that building designers take counter-terrorism measures into consideration when designing public open spaces. This reflects the threat posed not just to urban office buildings, but to public areas such as shopping centres, which clearly implicates the small businesses working within them.

Installing safety window film, and in some cases an edge retention system to the glass, reinforces existing glass and helps to hold broken pieces together in the event of an explosion, greatly reducing the chance of glass causing property damage, injury or death.

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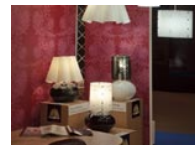
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Glass safety: Get it covered

Millbank Tower, like most British business premises, was built before 1992, when Regulation 14 came into force. Fortunately, the owners of the building took the necessary steps to retrofit safety window film. This kept both the baying mob, and the police assigned to restrain them, safe from serious injury.

The fact is, no matter how well guarded or structurally reinforced, every building shares the same chief vulnerability – glass windows. When it comes to securing buildings against the risks of glass breakage, safety window film provides similar benefits at a much more affordable price than safety and security glass.

Retrofitting safety window film is a relatively inexpensive and unobtrusive process, but most business premises are not up to scratch when it comes to glass safety. Prospective tenants, in all likelihood, will not have questioned their landlord on whether the property meets Regulation 14 before taking on a new lease. There is a huge opportunity, therefore, for installers to increase revenues by ensuring this compliance is achieved.

The clean up operations at Millbank after the student protests will no doubt be costly, but the price paid to have safety window film installed has proven its worth. There remains the serious question of how many UK businesses can say the same thing.

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