# Malicious fire at St Lucia Barracks sparks toxic pollution fears and calls for urgent security



A malicious fire at the former St Lucia Barracks in Omagh last week has ignited fears about hazardous air pollution among local residents, as a troubling trend of arson attacks continues to unfold. The blaze, which required a response from six fire engines and a command centre, engulfed parts of the abandoned military housing, releasing thick, black smoke that may have included toxic pollutants harmful to public health.

As the investigation into the fire develops, concerns are mounting regarding the safety protocols, or lack thereof, at the dilapidated site. Local leaders, including former Omagh MLA Ross Hussey, are expressing urgent calls for action, highlighting the necessity of securing the area for both community health and historical preservation. “This has gone far enough,” Hussey stated emphatically, demanding the reinstatement of full-time security at St Lucia. He lamented the potential loss of the heritage landmark, urging that “we cannot sit back and watch historical buildings be destroyed by morons.”

Experts echo these sentiments, warning that fires at derelict properties can release hazardous air pollutants (HAPs). According to the Indiana Department of Environmental Management, such burns can lead to the emission of a cocktail of harmful chemicals, including heavy metals and volatile organic compounds. These pollutants not only affect air quality but can also settle in soil and waterways, posing risks to human health and the environment alike. The impact of inhaling these substances can be severe, with health issues ranging from acute respiratory problems to chronic conditions like asthma and bronchitis.

Hussey cautioned that repeated fires at the St Lucia site could have dire long-term consequences for the community: “What’s being released into the air when these buildings go up in smoke? Where is the environmental response?” These apprehensions were reinforced by findings from health studies indicating that exposure to toxic substances common in residential fires can lead to significant health risks, including strokes and even mental health issues, such as anxiety and depression.

Adding to the urgency is a string of recent fires at the site, which has transitioned from a military and civic landmark to a target of vandalism and decay. Locals attribute this rise in anti-social behaviour partly to a troubling trend on social media, where videos showcase easy access to the abandoned buildings, igniting reckless curiosity among youth. Hussey has directed criticism towards both the Department for Infrastructure and the Ministry of Defence, seeking accountability and a clear plan for the site’s future. “Omagh has been sidelined. Where is the promised investment? Where is the vision for revitalising this historic site?” he queried.

The implications of neglecting St Lucia extend beyond community safety; they also touch upon economic viability. Hussey argues that continued destruction will ultimately lead to a situation where the site becomes a toxic brownfield—an abandoned area unfit for development. His vision for St Lucia Barracks is to transform it into a cultural and civic hub that could serve as a pivotal resource for the local community. “Each fire chips away at what’s salvageable,” he warned, underscoring the urgent need for proactive measures.

In the meantime, the police are appealing to the public for information related to suspicious activities at the site, emphasising that inquiries are ongoing. Without a concerted effort to secure the site, the risk to both community health and local heritage remains alarmingly high, leaving residents to wonder when, if ever, meaningful action will take shape.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.tyronecon.co.uk/tyrone-constitution/2025/05/23/gallery/hazardous-air-pollution-fears-rise-as-st-lucia-barracks-targeted-in-malicious-blaze-57624/), [[4]](https://true-builders.com/blog/dangerous-health-risks-that-fire-damage-can-cause/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.tyronecon.co.uk/tyrone-constitution/2025/05/23/gallery/hazardous-air-pollution-fears-rise-as-st-lucia-barracks-targeted-in-malicious-blaze-57624/), [[2]](https://www.in.gov/idem/openburning/health-risks-and-environmental-impacts/), [[3]](https://www.alldrybearriver.com/blog/harmful-health-effects-of-fire-damage-risks-to-know)
* Paragraph 3 – [[5]](https://www.dir.ca.gov/dosh/Fire_Resp_Protection.html), [[6]](https://healthpromotion.govt.nz/keeping-healthy/healthy-homes-environments/hazardous-substances/fires-smoke)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.tyronecon.co.uk/tyrone-constitution/2025/05/23/gallery/hazardous-air-pollution-fears-rise-as-st-lucia-barracks-targeted-in-malicious-blaze-57624/), [[3]](https://www.alldrybearriver.com/blog/harmful-health-effects-of-fire-damage-risks-to-know), [[7]](https://www.k2.co.nz/fire-damaged-properties-a-risk-to-health/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.tyronecon.co.uk/tyrone-constitution/2025/05/23/gallery/hazardous-air-pollution-fears-rise-as-st-lucia-barracks-targeted-in-malicious-blaze-57624/), [[2]](https://www.in.gov/idem/openburning/health-risks-and-environmental-impacts/), [[6]](https://healthpromotion.govt.nz/keeping-healthy/healthy-homes-environments/hazardous-substances/fires-smoke)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.tyronecon.co.uk/tyrone-constitution/2025/05/23/gallery/hazardous-air-pollution-fears-rise-as-st-lucia-barracks-targeted-in-malicious-blaze-57624/), [[7]](https://www.k2.co.nz/fire-damaged-properties-a-risk-to-health/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.tyronecon.co.uk/tyrone-constitution/2025/05/23/gallery/hazardous-air-pollution-fears-rise-as-st-lucia-barracks-targeted-in-malicious-blaze-57624/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.in.gov/idem/openburning/health-risks-and-environmental-impacts/> - This article from the Indiana Department of Environmental Management discusses the health risks and environmental impacts of open burning. It explains that burning materials like vegetation and trash releases harmful chemicals and particulate matter into the air, which can affect human health and the environment. The pollutants emitted depend on the materials being burned and can include toxic gases such as carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide, nitrogen oxides, hydrocarbons, and particulate matter. The article also highlights the potential for these pollutants to settle in lakes, streams, soil, and groundwater, posing risks to humans, wildlife, and the ecosystem.
3. <https://www.alldrybearriver.com/blog/harmful-health-effects-of-fire-damage-risks-to-know> - This blog post from All Dry Services discusses the harmful health effects of fire damage. It highlights several risks, including skin and eye irritation caused by soot and chemicals released during a fire, as well as mental health impacts such as anxiety and depression. The article also emphasizes the exposure to hazardous chemicals like particulate matter, volatile organic compounds (VOCs), and carbon monoxide, which can lead to various health complications. It advises using protective equipment like N95 respirators and staying indoors after a fire to minimize exposure to these harmful substances.
4. <https://true-builders.com/blog/dangerous-health-risks-that-fire-damage-can-cause/> - This article from True Builders outlines the dangerous health risks associated with fire damage. It discusses how soot and smoke odors can linger and cause respiratory issues like asthma and bronchitis. The piece also covers how soot and smoke can settle in porous materials around a property, leading to skin and eye irritation. Additionally, it highlights long-term health risks, including strokes and heart attacks, due to exposure to toxic substances released during a fire. The article emphasizes the importance of seeking professional fire damage restoration services to mitigate these health risks.
5. <https://www.dir.ca.gov/dosh/Fire_Resp_Protection.html> - This page from the California Department of Industrial Relations provides information on respiratory protection requirements during fire cleanup, removal, and demolition. It explains that after fires are extinguished, employees may be exposed to hazardous air contaminants when cleaning up fire-damaged structures and debris. The article lists various toxic substances found at fire cleanup sites, including particles, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), dioxins, furans, volatile organic compounds (VOCs), and formaldehyde. It emphasizes the importance of protecting employees from exposure to these hazardous substances during cleanup activities.
6. <https://healthpromotion.govt.nz/keeping-healthy/healthy-homes-environments/hazardous-substances/fires-smoke> - This page from Health Promotion New Zealand discusses the health risks associated with fires and smoke. It explains that fires can expose people to a range of hazardous substances, including chemicals released into the air that may disperse at concentrations well above background levels. The article also covers the potential for new chemicals to be formed as a result of combustion and the impact of fire-fighting water dispersing material from the fire into waterways. It highlights the importance of public health officers in managing these risks, especially in urban and built environments.
7. <https://www.k2.co.nz/fire-damaged-properties-a-risk-to-health/> - This article from K2 Environmental discusses the health risks associated with fire-damaged properties. It lists various toxins that can be present after a fire, including dioxins, hydrogen cyanide, acrolein, formaldehyde, and volatile organic compounds (VOCs). The piece emphasizes that these toxins can pose significant health risks to individuals occupying the property both short and long term. It also highlights the risks to people entering a fire-damaged site without protection against inhaling airborne toxins, such as firefighters, fire investigators, insurance assessors, tradespeople, and clean-up crews.