

Managing Risk: support for business

Commercial residential landlords

This fire protection, prevention and legislation advice refers to you if you own property that you let out to private tenants.

Who is responsible?

Fire safety provision and maintenance in residential accommodation is generally the responsibility of the landlord or managing agent. The relevant legislation is detailed later in this document. Private dwellings are not subject to fire safety legislation in the UK, nor are shared houses operating under a single joint tenancy agreement, such as a house shared by a group of students.

All other houses in multiple occupation (HMO) are subject to one or more forms of fire safety legislation. These include buildings converted into bedsits or flats, with cooking facilities in each letting or in a common area.

Key risks

Here's a summary of significant fire and liability hazards associated with commercial residential accommodation:

Structural or escape hazards

- Fire compartmentation of the building altered by contractors or vandalism
- Escape routes obstructed, or escape doors fixed
- Old wiring systems
- Residents removing smoke detectors or their batteries
- Unprotected letterboxes in fire doors

General fire hazards

- Deliberate fire raising
- Cooking and smoking risks, including deep fat fryers
- Portable electrical appliances, including poorly sited heaters
- Combustible decorations at Christmas and other festivals
- Large quantities of unopened mail and flyers
- Combustible waste and discarded furniture close to the building

Firefighting hazards

- Poor parking obstructing hydrants and access routes
- Dry riser outlets damaged by vandalism or theft





Risk control advice

Consider the following risk control measures to eliminate or reduce risks, especially in the common areas of buildings:

Basic fire security

- Install fire extinguishers in the kitchen and common areas, such as a laundrette –to **BS 5306-8** and inspect and maintain them in compliance with **BS 5306-3**
- Consider installing a fire alarm system (through an accredited contractor). Minimise the effects of false fire alarms on the occupants by fitting individual optical smoke alarms
- Minimise the storage of combustible waste within 10m of the premises, and install bollards or kerbs to prevent wheeled bins being moved to dangerous areas
- Protect letterbox slots to the same degree of fire resistance as the door
- Maintain heating in line with the manufacturer's instructions. Don't allow unauthorised portable heaters in common areas
- Don't allow decorations and decorative lights in escape routes
- Separate electrical and gas meters and units from common areas with a form of construction that provides at least 30 minutes' fire resistance

Communication

- Establish a helpline for tenants to report maintenance issues, vandalism, waste in common areas, and so on
- Provide written information for residents saying what action they should take if there's a fire
- Discourage residents from accumulating large quantities of combustible materials
- Put an effective emergency plan in place to ensure the resilience of the premises and welfare of the residents if there's a fire. You could use the free business continuity services of the Fire Protection Association. See thefpa.co.uk and robust.riscauthority.co.uk for more info

Escape and access routes

- Liaise with the fire and rescue service regarding access
- Ensure escape routes are free from obstructions and combustible materials
- Ensure you adequately sign escape routes and illuminate routes and exit signs by emergency lighting – installed and maintained to **BS 5266**

Risk assessment

- Create daily, weekly or monthly checklists to be completed by cleaning or maintenance staff, or agents
- If concerned about deliberate fire raising at the time of the fire risk assessment, put suitable security measures in place. This may include providing locks, and installing security lighting and CCTV protection
- Review the fire risk assessment regularly, and when refurbishment is planned, when tenants change, or there are significant changes to the potential sources of ignition or combustible materials
- Ensure the electrics are designed, installed and regularly tested by a competent electrician
- Arrange for portable electrical equipment, such as vacuum cleaners, used in the common areas to be inspected and tested in accordance with **HSG 107** or the **IET Code of practice**



General risk reduction

- Ensure you maintain and signpost fire doors, and fit automatic door closers
- Don't change doors that open off a protected route without permission, as they normally form part of the building's fire compartmentation
- Keep all service ducts and plant rooms locked
- Letterboxes in the hall mean no need for letter slots in fire doors
- Eliminate 'hot work' if possible, such as stripping paintwork. If you can't avoid it, minimise how long gas cylinders are on the premises. Ensure all work is controlled by permit
- Minimise the spread of fire by effective fire compartmentation. Ensure contractors provide suitable fire stopping around pipes and services that pass through fire compartment walls, floors and ceilings, in line with the **FPA Design guide**
- For new properties, consider installing an automatic fire suppression system, such as sprinklers, installed in compliance with the **LPC Sprinkler Rules** incorporating **BS EN 12845**. In different parts of the UK:
 - **England and Northern Ireland** require sprinkler protection for new residential blocks above 30 metres
 - **Scotland** requires sprinklers for all new residential care homes, sheltered housing, and high-rise domestic accommodation above 18 metres
 - **Wales** requires sprinklers in new and refurbished residential care homes, homes in multiple occupation, hostels, and new and converted single-family dwellings including houses and flats

Relevant legislation

- Converted dwellings with cooking facilities in each letting or in a common area are subject to the **Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005** (or equivalent legislation in Scotland and Northern Ireland). **You will require a fire risk assessment**
- **The Housing Act 2004** by way of the **Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS)** regulates fire safety in all forms of homes of multiple occupation (**HMO**)
- Landlords or managers may require residents to provide furniture that complies with the **Furniture and Furnishings (Fire) (Safety) Order 1988**

Other sources of useful information

1. **Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005**
2. hse.gov.uk/toolbox/fire.htm
3. **The Fire (Scotland) Act 2005**
4. **Fire Safety (Scotland) Regulations 2006**
5. **Fire and Rescue Services (Northern Ireland) Order 2006**
6. **Fire Safety Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010**
6. **Housing Act, 2004**

