



How to...

*communicate with tenants  
about fire safety*



# How to communicate with tenants about fire safety

## 1 Landlords - a key role in supporting fire safety

Under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (FSO), landlords, building owners and building managers (as the 'responsible person') have responsibility for fire safety in the communal areas of residential buildings. This means the responsible person has a legal responsibility to ensure that people who occupy or visit these buildings ('relevant persons') are not put at risk from fire and that they are safe places to live in, to work in and to visit. The responsible person must ensure they comply with the duties imposed by the FSO.

Therefore it is crucially important for the responsible person to know who their tenants are, how best to communicate with them about fire safety, and what measures to put in place to ensure they are safe in their homes and communities. This How to... provides useful information on how best to engage and communicate with tenants about fire safety.

The social housing sector is diverse and provides homes to a high proportion of households with specific needs which can impact upon the safety of people living in the household.

- 24 per cent of households in the social rented sector are made up of older people aged 60 and over
- 15 per cent of households in the social rented sector are made up of lone parent households
- 50 per cent of households in the social rented sector have a disabled person in the household - disabled people are twice as likely as non-disabled people to live in social housing.

## Communicating fire safety in housing

According to statistics published by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) in 2012-13 there were 168 fatalities in accidental dwelling fires in England. This represents a 20 per cent decrease on 2011-12. Although fire safety in homes has been steadily improving in recent decades, many dwelling fires are preventable.

### **Lakanal House Inquest - rule 43 letter - landlords need to improve fire safety awareness with tenants**

In July 2009, six people died after a fire swept through Lakanal House a high rise tower block in Cambewell, London. In 2013, the Inquest concluded that many tenants lacked knowledge about what to do in the event of a fire in a high-rise building. The Coroner recommended that the landlord should work with tenants to improve fire safety awareness, including:

- communicating to new tenants the fire safety features of their home and appropriate escape and emergency responses
- providing clear guidance about what to do in the event of a fire
- considering additional ways in which fire safety messages might be communicated to tenants.

**Visit:** [www.lambeth.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/9A066872-6BBA-4CD7-9D65-A658156A2008/0/LetteTorLondonBoroughOfSouthwarkPursuantToRule43On28March2013.pdf](http://www.lambeth.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/9A066872-6BBA-4CD7-9D65-A658156A2008/0/LetteTorLondonBoroughOfSouthwarkPursuantToRule43On28March2013.pdf)

## Understanding people's attitudes towards fire risk - final report to the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG)

Research for DCLG aimed at improving peoples' understanding and changing attitudes to fire safety found that:

- levels of concern were often not matched by appropriate fire precautions (e.g. no smoke alarms or fire escape plans or people deactivating alarms)
- fire safety messages should be tailored or personalised to a target audience
- targeting messages to family and friends can influence the adoption of fire precautions
- fire safety strategies should help people manage 'risky' behaviours (e.g. smoking outside, using water to put out cigarettes, not cooking whilst under the influence of alcohol, using deep fat fryers rather than chip pans, etc)
- working with other community advocates and partners (e.g. fire and rescue services or partners like Age UK) can play a key role in supporting safety initiatives
- customer insight driven approaches are most effective (e.g. targeting specific groups).

**Visit:** [www.google.co.uk/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CC8QFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwebarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk%2F20120919132719%2Fwww.communities.gov.uk%2Fdocuments%2Ffire%2Fpdf%2Ffireriskattitudes.pdf&ei=v0KLUtCUJ4rN0QWy6oCABA&usq=AFQjCNEiGN23GA-XV8EFGhaqgJ-UuNsw&sig2=FnQiYzWM16S4fOlraA5cVdA&bvm=bv.56643336,d.d2k](http://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CC8QFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwebarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk%2F20120919132719%2Fwww.communities.gov.uk%2Fdocuments%2Ffire%2Fpdf%2Ffireriskattitudes.pdf&ei=v0KLUtCUJ4rN0QWy6oCABA&usq=AFQjCNEiGN23GA-XV8EFGhaqgJ-UuNsw&sig2=FnQiYzWM16S4fOlraA5cVdA&bvm=bv.56643336,d.d2k)

## Knowing who your tenants are

Tenant insight is the use of different sources of information to develop a comprehensive knowledge base about tenants. It links factual data with information on behaviours, needs and aspirations, so that landlords can target specific information in terms of content, media and audience to support communication and engagement. Tenant insight can also be used to support specific fire safety initiatives.

There is a range of information which landlords might want to collect which can be used to inform fire safety engagement initiatives, inform effective fire safety arrangements, and support the completion of the fire risk assessment. This includes:

### Information about household composition

- who lives in the property?
- are there vulnerability indicators (e.g. a sensory impairment such as a hearing impairment which could mean a person might not be able to hear a smoke alarm, frailty or ill-health which might impede mobility), or are there infants in the household?
- have there been fires in the property before; and if so how did they start and what sort of fires were they?
- have alterations been made to the property which might have compromised containment of the dwelling (e.g. works such as the installation of new electrical wiring or heating systems)?
- are there mobility or sensory issues (e.g. hearing or visual impairment) which might prevent members of a household responding appropriately in the event of a fire?

### Information about communication needs and preferences

- can you segment your tenants into different groups which prefer different communication or engagement approaches, and how might this inform a range of different approaches your organisation will use for fire safety initiatives?
- how many tenants make use of new and mobile technology (e.g. apps or social media such as Twitter or Facebook)? Could these new media be used to communicate fire safety messages?

- are there language or communication barriers which might prevent occupants knowing what to do in the event of a fire (e.g. learning difficulties)? Or do people in the household not speak or read English as a first language?

### Information about attitudes, lifestyles, challenges and aspirations

- are there lifestyle issues in the household which you need to consider (e.g. smoking, alcohol or substance misuse issues)?
- are there challenges such as fuel poverty or hoarding behaviour which might indicate fire risk?
- are tenants at risk from harassment or hate incidents which could include arson?

### Information about physical aspects of the property

- are there smoke alarms in the property? Are they working, correctly placed and of sufficient quantity?
- are there physical hazards such as missing internal doors or electrical hazard indicators such as electrical socket overloading?

## Communicating with tenants - thinking it through

There are a range of different ways in which landlords can communicate with tenants for fire safety. These include:

- **selecting from different options when communicating with tenants: these options should be aligned with tenants' needs and preferences, for example:**
  - articles in newsletters on fire safety
  - specific information leaflets on fire safety
  - a fire safety section in a tenants' handbook
  - open days (with community partners e.g. fire and rescue service)
  - road shows with community partners
  - specific fire safety information on your website
  - use of new media for fire safety (e.g. Facebook, Twitter)
  - fire safety focus groups or introduce fire safety as an area for scrutiny
  - text messages
  - e-mail bulletins or texts on fire safety
  - partnership working with community advocates for fire safety themed events (e.g. targeted campaigns around Bonfire Night)
- **working with community partners to deliver joint messages and initiatives: community partners could include the following:**
  - fire and rescue services
  - schools
  - police
  - third sector community partners (e.g. Age UK)
- **targeting key fire safety messages: fire safety messages should be targeted and action focused. For example:**
  - **fire safety at home** – smoking, cooking, electrical safety, safe heating, storage of flammable or combustible materials in the home, smoke alarm installation, testing and cleaning, fire escapes and fire escape planning
  - **assessing if anyone in the household may be at particular risk from fire** – e.g. a person in the household has a disability which affects visibility, hearing or mobility, or frailty, or there are infants living in the household, or a person in the household does not understand English, or a person in the household is a smoker, or misuses drugs or alcohol; or a person in the household has a learning disability.

- **safe use of common parts** – keeping common areas clear and emergency exits un-obstructed by household objects (e.g. bicycles, mobility scooters, recycling boxes, bins, furniture, etc)
- **home fire safety checks** – promoting opportunities for home fire safety checks if these are provided by the local fire and rescue service
- **responding to an emergency** – how to respond safely in different fire related emergency situations (e.g. what to do if a fire breaks out in your home, or an adjacent property or in common parts; and stay-put and/or evacuation policies)
- **additional sources of support** - for fire safety (e.g. aids and adaptations and other occupational health initiatives, installation of smoke alarms or static sprinklers; or other forms of community or third sector advocacy and support)
- **fire safety policies and procedures** (e.g. your policies on fire safety and the use of communal areas, the use and safe storage of mobility scooters, the your approach to fire related anti-social behaviour and hate incidents).

## Learning from others

**DCLG** has brought together a wide range of publications offering guidance about fire safety for different groups of people, or for specific circumstances or types of accommodation. These are invaluable resources which can be embedded into your website or given to tenants to inform them about fire safety in the home.

This site also contains links to the **Fire Kills** Facebook page and **Fire Kills** Youtube videos.

**Visit:** [www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-communities-and-local-government/series/fire-safety-guidance](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-communities-and-local-government/series/fire-safety-guidance)

**London Fire Brigade** (LFB) used Experian's Public Sector Mosaic segmentation data to identify fire risk and how this relates to household behaviour. This data provided a picture of household location, demographic features, lifestyles and behaviours. LFB identified that households at particular risk of fire are often affected by several 'risk factors' including:

- disability, especially impaired mobility
- visual and/or hearing impairments
- mental health problems
- drugs and/or alcohol misuse
- smoking
- old age
- living alone.

**Visit:** [www.london-fire.gov.uk/news/LatestNewsReleases\\_Visitsprevent5000fires.asp#UmUVWFOk4c8](http://www.london-fire.gov.uk/news/LatestNewsReleases_Visitsprevent5000fires.asp#UmUVWFOk4c8)

**Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service** (MFRS) undertook a customer led transformation programme with the aim of embedding customer insight partnership working with other public sector organisations (including housing) to improve the quality of life for households identified as being at risk of accidental dwelling fires. MFRS was able to create a localised segmentation model which helped the fire and rescue service to better identify groups that were particularly vulnerable to accidental fires and to identify individual households at risk.

**Visit:** [www.local.gov.uk/c/document\\_library/get\\_file?uuid=670e4b6c-876a-40f9-a69a-ca918b667030&groupId=10180](http://www.local.gov.uk/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=670e4b6c-876a-40f9-a69a-ca918b667030&groupId=10180)



## Learning from others

In order to achieve their service mission statement of 'creating the safest community' **Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service** have identified a priority to protect and to educate householders so they can prevent fires in their own homes. They offer home fire safety checks to reduce the number of deaths and injuries resulting from accidental dwelling fires. To complete these checks, the following information about the household is gathered on a form.

|   |   |
|---|---|
| Address information                                     |   |
| Reason for home fire safety check                       |   |
| Ethnic background of household                          |   |
| Number of smoke alarms in property                      | Existing, not working, battery operated, incorrectly sited  |
| Occupancy factors                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• tenure: privately owned or rented</li> <li>• household age characteristics: under 5, 5-15, 16-39, 40-49, 50-59, 60-64, 65 plus, living alone</li> <li>• household composition characteristics: lone parents, disability or impairment, communication or language issues</li> </ul> |
| Hazard factors (household)                              | Previous fires<br>Smokers in the household<br>Householder smokes in bed<br>Chip pans are in use<br>Misuse of candles<br>Medication issues<br>Alcohol issues<br>Substance issues   |
| Hazard factors (observations)                           | Electrical issues<br>High fire load   |
| Structural issues                                       | Open plan, open loft, doors missing, other issues   |
| Control measures  | Fire safety information given<br>Referral made to fire service<br>Number of smoke alarms fitted<br>Other  |
| Details of person completing the home fire safety check | Name, role, section, date, time<br>Comments   |

If a person is judged to be in serious and imminent danger, they are referred to the fire service prevention and education team as soon as possible.

**Contact:** Mark Whittle [mark.whittle@southtynesidehomes.org](mailto:mark.whittle@southtynesidehomes.org)

## Learning from others

**Hillingdon Homes** have produced a practice note for staff on the storage of items in internal shared areas to ensure they are confident, robust and consistent in their interpretation and enforcement for escape routes in flats and maisonettes. They have also produced a fire safety leaflet for tenants in blocks of flats and maisonettes. The leaflet reminds tenants of their tenancy conditions which prohibits them leaving items in shared areas and to keep escape routes free from clutter and obstructions

**Contact:** Rod Smith [rsmith1@hillingdon.gov.uk](mailto:rsmith1@hillingdon.gov.uk)

**Colchester Borough Council** and Essex County Fire and Rescue Service worked together to provide a speed dating-style safety event to get advice on a range of topics including fire safety. The event called the Older Persons Crucial Crew was aimed at over-65-year-olds from clubs and groups serving older people in the Colchester area with the aim of disseminating safety messages, including fire safety in the home.

**Visit:** [www.colchester.gov.uk/article/8440/Safety-advice-for-older-people-at-Crucial-Crew-event](http://www.colchester.gov.uk/article/8440/Safety-advice-for-older-people-at-Crucial-Crew-event)

**Solihull Community Housing** brief all tenants on fire safety measures specific to their new home at sign up. They are advised that they will be contacted by West Midlands Fire Service (WMFS) who can offer a home safety check. Tenants are required to provide reasonable access as per their tenancy agreement to allow the landlord to complete annual gas safety checks and allow WMFS to conduct their home safety checks.

**Visit:** [www.solihullcommunityhousing.org.uk/index.php?fid=15&task=download&option=com\\_flexicontent&id=417&Itemid=92&cid=3136](http://www.solihullcommunityhousing.org.uk/index.php?fid=15&task=download&option=com_flexicontent&id=417&Itemid=92&cid=3136)

On 5th November 2013, the **Riverside Group** used social media site Twitter to promote fire safety to tenants and residents by posting a link to the following free web-based resource.

**Visit:** [www.bonfire-night-safety.co.uk/](http://www.bonfire-night-safety.co.uk/)

**One Vision Homes** communicate regularly with tenants about fire safety in newsletters and posters on noticeboards and in communal areas. They work closely with the London Fire Brigade and promote their home safety visit service. They also run fire estate days across many estates with London Fire Brigade. They have a designated webpage for fire safety.

**Visit:** [www.onehousinggroup.co.uk/resident-services/repairs-and-maintenance/fire-safety-your-home](http://www.onehousinggroup.co.uk/resident-services/repairs-and-maintenance/fire-safety-your-home)

**CityWest Homes** communicate with tenants about fire safety in different ways. They have a designated area for fire safety on their website including links to a video from London Fire Brigade, links to fire safety information and their policy on use of communal areas.

**Visit:** [www.cwh.org.uk/about-us/health-and-safety/fire-safety/](http://www.cwh.org.uk/about-us/health-and-safety/fire-safety/)

Firemark is a programme developed by **Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service** that will provide fire and rescue services and their partners with information to support landlords. It includes an interactive online risk assessment which can support awareness of fire safety.

**Visit:** [www.dsfire.gov.uk/YourSafety/SafetyAtWorkAndOtherPlaces/Firemark.cfm?siteCategoryId=4&T1ID=36&T2ID=315](http://www.dsfire.gov.uk/YourSafety/SafetyAtWorkAndOtherPlaces/Firemark.cfm?siteCategoryId=4&T1ID=36&T2ID=315)

## Useful resources and information

LGA (2011) Fire safety in purpose built blocks of flats

[www.local.gov.uk/publications-/journal\\_content/56/10180/3369777/PUBLICATION](http://www.local.gov.uk/publications-/journal_content/56/10180/3369777/PUBLICATION)

CIH Practice Brief (2011) Fire safety in housing

[www.cih.org/publication/display/vpathDCR/templatedata/cih/publication/data/Fire\\_Safety](http://www.cih.org/publication/display/vpathDCR/templatedata/cih/publication/data/Fire_Safety)

LACORS (2006) Fire safety risk assessment: sleeping accommodation

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/fire-safety-risk-assessment-sleeping-accommodation](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fire-safety-risk-assessment-sleeping-accommodation)

DCLG (2007) Fire safety risk assessment: means of escape for disabled people

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/fire-safety-risk-assessment-means-of-escape-for-disabled-people](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fire-safety-risk-assessment-means-of-escape-for-disabled-people)

Fire Risk Management (FRM) News - Technical publication on fire safety and loss prevention (see article in March 2013 by Sarah Stevenson-Jones – Resident engagement) [www.frmjournal.com](http://www.frmjournal.com)

Top tips: how to improve tenant communication from the Guardian On-line Housing Hub

[www.theguardian.com/housing-network/2012/nov/10/top-tips-improve-tenant-communication](http://www.theguardian.com/housing-network/2012/nov/10/top-tips-improve-tenant-communication)

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