

Gateway customer guide to:

# Fire Safety for Flats

Factsheet

**05**



**Gateway**  
Property Management

# Fire Safety for Flats

## Overview

**Meeting fire safety requirements is critical to people's lives, property and belongings, especially in blocks of flats. Landlords and their agents, tenants and homeowners all have responsibilities regarding this vital matter. And every resident should know what to do in case of a fire.**

This document provides general guidance, so residents can help by doing their bit and homeowners can be clear on their obligations.

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# Fire safety advice for residents

## Fit approved smoke alarms

The best way to protect your home and household from fire is by fitting approved smoke alarms and testing these regularly. A smoke alarm can provide an early warning of a fire, enabling you to make your escape, but only if it is working.

- Fit smoke alarms on every level of your home.
- Test your smoke alarms regularly (once a week).
- Never disconnect, or take the batteries out of, your smoke alarms.
- Make sure your alarms meet British and European standards.

### Where to place smoke alarms

If your home is not already provided with smoke alarms, fit one in your entrance hallway, as well as the landing of any upper or lower floor. For even greater protection, fit an additional smoke alarm in your lounge and a heat alarm in your kitchen.

### Alarms powered by the electricity mains

If your smoke alarms aren't battery operated, arrange for a qualified electrician to fit these devices. Make sure you buy models that have a standby power supply, in case of a mains' failure.

When installing more than one alarm, it is best to link these together, so they all sound a warning in the event of a fire.

## Did you know?

People living without smoke alarms are twice as likely to die in the event of a fire.

## Keep doors closed at night

Make sure you shut doors before heading to bed, especially to your lounge and kitchen. This simple action will help prevent a fire in your flat from spreading.

## Keep communal areas clear

Never leave any belongings or rubbish in a communal area – including corridors, the lift lobby and stairways. If you do, this could prevent you and your neighbours safely escaping the building in the event of a fire.

### Doormats in communal areas are a real fire hazard

Welcome mats placed *outside* a flat or apartment may seem like a nice touch, but think again. They're well known to help spread fire, blocking essential escape routes for you, your loved ones and the neighbours. Don't put one down.

### Doormats and other death-traps

Doormats, comfy chairs, books, magazines, plastic flowers and net curtains are all fire risks when placed in any communal area, including just outside your flat door.

**Keep all communal areas clear. This may be your escape route in case of a fire.**

# Evacuation procedures

Your flat is in a building that should be designed to resist fire. A fire should not immediately spread from one flat to another, meaning you need not leave your home straight away if there is a fire elsewhere in the block. **That said, if in doubt, get out.**

Always evacuate the building if your flat is affected by smoke or heat, or if you are told to do so by the fire service. Use the stairway to reach ground level, wherever possible.

If you're in a corridor, lift lobby or stairway and notice a fire, leave the building immediately. Where it's safe to do so, alert other residents in the immediate vicinity on your way out by knocking on their doors.

**Never put yourself at risk. Do not return to your flat until the authorities tell you it's safe to do so.**

## Need to open a fire door or any closed door?

This should always be a last resort; the official advice remains to stay where you are if possible. It is harder for the fire service to locate people who are moving about a building.

If you do need to open a door when there's a fire:

- use your eyes, ears and smell to sense the surroundings
- slightly touch the door, preferably the handle with the back of your hand (the most sensitive part), to test for heat – never grab a handle
- get into a crouching position and, when opening the door, use the door as a shield to protect yourself
- take as quick a look as you can to assess the situation. Is there smoke or a fire? Is it safe to move? Keep to the escape route, wherever possible.

## When unable to evacuate

When trapped or unable to escape a fire, make sure that all doors are closed. Try to seal any gaps in the door, especially between the bottom of the door and the carpet. This will slow down the speed that smoke enters the room, giving you more time. Smoke is deadlier than the fire itself.

Where possible, keep all windows closed too. If the fire is on the floor below, smoke could rise and enter the room from the outside of the building. Smoke can also carry fire, so an open window could mean the fire spreads more quickly. Of course, if you need to open a window to shout for help, do so. If you have your mobile phone on you, use this to call the emergency services to let them know you are still inside the building.

If the room starts filling with smoke, get as low as possible to the ground. Smoke will always go up to the highest point before working its way down.

## Remember

- Test your smoke alarm once a week.
- Keep the exit route from your flat clear, so you can escape in an emergency.
- Keep all communal areas clear of all obstructions and hazardous substances.
- Close doors at night, especially lounge and kitchen doors to prevent fire spreading.
- Plan your escape now. Don't wait until a fire happens. Be fully prepared.

**Never put yourself at risk. Do not return to your flat until the authorities tell you it's safe to do so.**



# Guidance for flat front doors

## Doors save lives

In any shared residential building, the front doors of individual flats are an important part of the whole building's fire protection solution (sometimes referred to as a 'structural fire safety' component). They are a key part of a fire escape route in a block of flats, so every front door needs to be fit for purpose.

### Ensuring all residents are safe

Individual flat doors should:

- be close fitting, with no gaps, warping or damage
- have fire-resistant glazing and other openings that meet the appropriate standards, both as part of the door and to the sides of the door, where relevant
- use intumescent materials – materials that swell – to protect door openings, such as letterboxes
- only have door fittings that have been built in, or installed, correctly.

### Replacing a front door?

The new door must meet the relevant British or European standard (testing to the appropriate period of fire resistance).

### Who's responsible for flat front doors?

For rented flats, the landlord is the 'responsible person' for all individual front doors, making sure tenants know that they should not change them. For leasehold flats, the leaseholders have responsibilities to maintain the standards described here.

If replacement front doors do not meet the relevant standards, the doors should be replaced or brought up to an acceptable standard.

Lease terms or rental agreements should describe these responsibilities.

For a Best Practice Guide, visit:

[www.bwfcertifire.org.uk/assets/bwf-best-practice-guide-2016.pdf](http://www.bwfcertifire.org.uk/assets/bwf-best-practice-guide-2016.pdf)

### Front doors on older properties

The Local Government Association's guidance document for fire safety in purpose-built blocks considers older properties, including the importance of front doors and the differing standards of protection provided.

Guidance is clear that fire risk assessments must take into account front doors in older properties and prioritise upgrading doors to modern standards, where appropriate. Fitting self-closers on front doors is raised in several places, being essential to ensuring protected routes remain safe. Self-closers should be a priority for any fire risk assessment.



# Homeowner fire safety responsibilities

**Homeowners have additional fire safety responsibilities. This is especially the case when subletting; please see the following section for further details.**

## **Fire safety responsibilities**

- Remove any fire risks, including anything stored on balconies that could easily catch fire.
- Do not overload electrical sockets.
- Install smoke alarms and test these regularly.
- Ensure that all fire doors – which include the flat's front door – are fire resistant. The terms of your lease will make it clear that the front door to your individual property is your responsibility.

## **Fire doors are critical**

Fire doors are built to restrict, and delay the path of, a fire. They save lives. Many new homeowners install a new front door. We strongly advise that you arrange for an independent fire assessment of your front door to ensure it complies with current regulations.

As a general guide, some – but not all – wooden doors are fire resistant and UPVC or plastic doors are not, in most cases. If the assessment shows your front door is not a fire door, replace it with a new timber one. This should be made to British Standard 476: Part 22: 1987 or the British Standard EN 1634-1: 2000.

## **Remove metal security grilles?**

If a fire starts in your block, security grilles will prevent you from leaving the property and the block as quickly as you should. This danger escalates further if the fire occurs in your own property. Advice from the London Fire Brigade is to remove any door grille and replace it with another form of security.

# An important note when subletting

**If you sublet your property as a homeowner, you have additional responsibilities and legal obligations to your tenants.**

You should consider the risks to your tenants in the event of a fire and take all necessary precautions to minimise those risks. This includes you, as the landlord, installing smoke alarms. It is also your responsibility to test these detectors; you cannot pass this duty on to your tenants. You should also make sure that Gateway Property Management has your latest contact details in case of an emergency at your property.

When subletting, ensure your tenants are aware of the following advice:

- keep communal areas clear
- never wedge fire doors open in corridors
- never leave bin bags, bicycles, children's buggies, plant pots, washing or other obstructions in communal corridors or walkways
- keep all exits from the home clear, so people can get out easily if there is a fire
- do not store anything on a balcony, patio or in a garden that could easily catch fire and cause a fire to spread
- never overload electrical sockets and take care when cooking
- stub out cigarettes fully and do not smoke in bed.



