

ARHM GOOD PRACTICE NOTE

MEANS OF ESCAPE IN CASE OF FIRE FOR RETIREMENT ACCOMMODATION

The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 applies to all common parts and non-domestic parts of housing.

Managers must arrange for a fire risk assessment of common parts to be carried out by a competent person and for a review of that assessment at appropriate intervals.

Legislation does not set out specific time periods for when fire risk assessments must be carried out or reviewed, however the Local Government Association publication, “Fire Safety in purpose-built blocks of flats” suggests the following:

For low-rise blocks of up to three storeys above ground, built in the last 20 years, fire risk assessments should be:

- reviewed every 2 years
- redone every 4 years

For blocks with higher risks (for example, because of the age of the building), or those more than 3 storeys high, the Local Government Association (LGA) recommends assessments should be:

- reviewed every year
- redone every 3 years

In extreme cases (for the highest-risk buildings), the LGA recommends doing a new fire risk assessment once a year.

Leaseholders and the Secretary of any residents or Recognised Tenants’ Association should be informed when an assessment is taking place, and copies of the fire risk assessment should be made available on request.

The fire risk assessment will include the recommended plan for escape in case of fire.

The National Fire Chiefs Council publication “Fire Safety in Specialised Housing” offers guidance and practical advice on how to assess the risk from fire, appropriate fire prevention and protection measures and how to manage fire safety in specialised housing buildings.

Guidance is also available through the LACoRS guide “Housing – Fire Safety: Guidance on fire safety provisions for certain types of existing housing”

Fire Precautions

Owing to the high degree of compartmentation provided in modern flats, the spread of fire from one dwelling to another is unusual. Residents will usually be safe to remain in their property unless told to leave by a fire officer or the scheme manager.

All residents should be given a Fire Procedure Notice to be affixed to the rear of their entrance door. A different notice should be displayed adjacent to each break glass call point. A third notice is required to advise the warden/resident manager of the appropriate action.

NB: Standard pre-printed notices should not be used. These advise the reader to attempt to fight the fire if safe to do so and are therefore not suitable for retirement housing

Fire drills for residents are difficult to enforce and are not considered necessary. Staff, however, must be trained how to act in a fire.

A log should be kept of any residents who would require assistance in the event of a fire in order to evacuate their dwelling and/or building. The fire service needs to be made aware of the log and its location.

Lifts should not be used in the event of a fire. Signs should be clearly displayed on all landing lift doors.

The fire service should be consulted as to the need and positioning of fire exit direction signs.

Fire exit doors should be easily opened from the inside without the use of a key or difficult to reach bolts etc.

The manager should ensure that fire doors in communal areas are not wedged open. They should also be regularly inspected for correct operation, checking for warping, damage to smoke seals etc.

Soft furnishings should be removed from escape routes.

Furniture in communal areas should satisfy BS 7176.

Curtains in communal areas should satisfy BS 5867.

Residents and staff should receive on-going education in fire safety.

The fire service should be advised of the 'means of escape' policy/procedure being adopted and asked for their comments, particularly in the case of older converted properties.

Fire Equipment

Residents should be encouraged to purchase self-contained smoke alarms, (preferably mains operated) to be fitted within their dwelling.

Communal areas should be covered by a mains-operated fire detection and alarm system.

Manual alarm systems should be upgraded with the inclusion of smoke/heat detectors.

Fire alarms should be connected to a central control station (normally via the scheme manager call system). This is essential for developments without a resident scheme manager.

Escape routes should be fitted with emergency lighting. The minimum standard should clearly identify staircase and exit doors.

Fire alarms, emergency lighting, fire extinguishers, smoke windows, smoke exhaust fans, dry risers etc. should all be tested and serviced in accordance with the manufacturers' instructions and recommendations of the relevant British Standard Code of Practice.

Communal kitchens fitted with a cooker require a fire blanket.

The advice of the Fire Service should be sought as to their recommendation for fire extinguishers, the type and number required and their siting.

All communal staircases should be fitted with handrails to both sides; intermediate landings should also be included.

Consideration should be given to the fitting of automatic electromagnetic hold-open devices to cross- corridor fire doors, where possible. This allows easier movement for residents whilst still providing satisfactory smoke control.

DISCLAIMER:

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