

## **ARHM GOOD PRACTICE NOTE**

### **MOBILITY SCOOTERS**

The use of mobility scooters can enhance the quality of life for many older or less mobile residents, who otherwise may be limited in their ability to access common facilities and the wider community.

With the increased use of mobility scooters, comes the corresponding fire safety concern associated with their storage and charging. The design of many schemes, particularly smaller and older buildings, does not always lend itself easily to the safe storage and charging of mobility scooters. The lack of space and the layout of the corridors, lifts and stairways in communal areas mean that individuals will want to leave scooters adjacent to their front entrance doors on protected escape routes or within protected stairways.

When a mobility scooter is involved in fire, the risk of harm is significant. In residential buildings, mobility scooter fires can pose a life safety risk to tenants, employees, firefighters and other relevant persons.

#### **Legislation and Guidance**

The primary legislation relating to mobility scooters includes:

- Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005
- Equality Act 2010
- Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999
- Use of Invalid Carriages on Highways Regulations 1988

The National Fire Chiefs Council – Mobility Scooter Guidance for Residential Buildings contains comprehensive guidance for landlords and managers

#### **Fire Safety Considerations**

Mobility scooters involved in a fire can release large volumes of smoke and generate significant heat outputs. If mobility scooters are stored on escape routes and are involved in a fire, there is a potential that escape routes will become impassable and residents could be placed at significant risk in the event of a fire. Therefore, appropriate measures must be considered within the building's fire risk assessment to address the risks posed by the storage and charging of mobility scooters.

Mobility scooters are often stored outside and not in a secured compound, giving potential for deliberate ignition. This can allow for fire spreading through windows and doors, into buildings and internal compartments, leading in the extreme to fatalities.

The recent use of lithium iron phosphate (LiFePO<sub>4</sub>) batteries instead of lead acid batteries to power mobility scooters has increased risks due to their unpredictable and adverse reaction when subjected to fire. All batteries can give off hydrogen when charging

In a fire a motorised scooter can reach extreme temperatures and give off dense and toxic smoke. Tests have shown that a fire in a mobility scooter being stored within common exit routes renders untenable conditions in less than 3 minutes, the smoke and heat making such routes impassable.

In light of this escape routes should be kept clear to enable all relevant persons to evacuate quickly and safely if required.

Storage of mobility scooters should be fully risk assessed ensuring it does not compromise the means of escape.

Storage and use of mobility scooters in residential buildings can also pose other safety concerns and cause damage to the building such as fire doors and walls which could impact on the fire safety measures within the building.

Such risks should be considered as part of the building fire risk assessment and steps taken to address such issues as they arise. In some cases competent advice may be required to ensure fire safety is not affected.

### **Storage and Charging**

Residents should be encouraged to ensure that they follow any manufacturer guidelines or instructions on the safe use and charging of their equipment.

Any storage area within a building must have at least 30 minutes' fire resisting construction and early warning systems available if the building has a common fire alarm or some way of monitoring this.

Removing the battery from the mobility scooter will remove the source of ignition.

Restrict hours for charging and don't allow charging at night, from 8pm to 8 am, to reduce the risk to those who are asleep.

Where the risk assessment identifies that the resident's flat is not suitable e.g. where their own means of escape from their dwelling could be affected, then other areas of the building should be considered. This should include assessing existing rooms or areas within the grounds where reasonable adjustments can be made to store scooters

Any charging in designated storage areas should be subject to portable appliance testing and subject to a risk assessment.

### **External Storage**

External storage solutions should be fully risk assessed, giving consideration to arson, location, construction, fire spread, access/egress and maintenance.

### **Managed approaches to Storage**

The layout and design of each building will be different; the type, number and location of mobility scooters will also differ and the needs of individual residents should be considered as part of the overall assessment of risk. A solution that might be appropriate in one building may not be acceptable in another. Likewise, a solution that might be appropriate for one resident may not be

appropriate for other residents. Although external storage could be considered as an option, the vulnerability and mobility of residents may make it impracticable for them to utilise external facilities.

Policies for the use and storage of motorised scooters should be identified as part of the fire risk assessment for the building and recorded.

The options detailed below are given by the National Fire Chiefs Council as a solutions based approach that could be applied to any mobility scooter situation identified, any one of which might be acceptable in the right circumstances.

Where, in the following options, there is reference to fire-resisting construction and fire-resisting doors, the period of fire resistance should normally be 60 minutes, except where an area contains no more than three mobility scooters or is provided with automatic fire suppression, in which case 30 minutes' fire resistance will normally be adequate.

- Option 1: External parking with charging facilities

The parking of mobility scooters outside premises is potentially an option. In most instances, it would be expected that a charging facility would be provided adjacent to the parking area. Security and the risk of arson would need to be considered, as would the location normally a minimum of 6m away, which should not present a risk of fire spread into the building in the event of a fire.

- Option 2: External storage with charging facilities

The provision of purpose-built secure storage and charging facilities (including individual storage units), or the conversion of existing external facilities, such as garages or storerooms, to provide storage and charging facilities, might be considered. Dependent on their location and proximity to the building, such facilities may need to be fire-resisting enclosures and may also be fitted with automatic fire detection if they can be monitored.

- Option 3: Purpose-built internal storage rooms

The provision of purpose-built rooms inside premises for the storage and charging of one or more mobility scooters need to be enclosed in fire-resisting construction, and be fitted with fire-resisting, self-closing doors and automatic fire detection.

- Option 4: Adapted internal storage rooms

The provision of specifically adapted rooms inside premises for the storage and charging of one or more mobility scooters might be an option. Rooms would, as a minimum, need to be enclosed in fire-resisting construction, and be fitted with fire-resisting, self-closing doors and automatic fire detection.

- Option 5: Existing fire-resisting rooms utilized for storage

The storage and charging inside rooms, not originally designed for this purpose but which are separated from the remainder of the premises with fire-resisting construction and self-closing fire doors, might be considered. This may include options to utilise storerooms, or utility rooms, on a permanent or temporary basis. In these instances, the use of the rooms, or clearly

separated areas, might need to be restricted to the storage and charging of mobility scooters and not combined with other uses.

- Option 6: Storage and charging within residents' own accommodation

Suitable storage and charging arrangements might be possible inside the accommodation of individual residents. This option removes the risk from the common areas, and it places the storage and charging of scooters within a fire-resisting enclosure beyond a fire-resisting, self-closing door. However, this potentially places individual residents at risk from a fire involving a mobility scooter in their own home. If this option is considered, the scooter should not be stored or charged in the hallway, if this is the only means of escape available. The scooter should, preferably, be stored and charged in a separate room, which is fitted with a fire-resisting or substantial door and fire detection. Residents should be provided with advice on the safe use and charging of scooters as part of a person-centred approach.

- Option 7: Internal storage in other areas

If mobility scooters are stored in any other areas not mentioned in the above, options must be thoroughly fire risk assessed in conjunction with the local Fire and Rescue Service and the housing provider. Compensatory factors that might be considered could, for example, include some or all of the following: the provision of an automatic sprinkler or watermist system, a comprehensive fire detection and alarm system (which is automatically linked to an alarm receiving centre), adequate smoke ventilation (to keep flats smoke free), alternative means of escape available from all flats that open directly onto the escape route in question, or the use of scooters with limited flammability. The appropriate combination of measures should be determined by the fire risk assessment for the premises.

The Responsible Person should ensure the maximum numbers of mobility scooters identified for the premises is in the Fire Risk Assessment. Residents should be aware of local arrangements which will help to future proof mobility scooter storage issues in buildings.

### **Management Considerations**

In all cases residents should be required to gain consent to store a mobility scooter within a building. Landlords and Managers should reserve the right to refuse storage where none of the options above are suitable and/or this would breach legislation or impact on the health, safety or welfare of other occupants within the building.

Residents should be informed of Mobility Scooter Policies and Conditions of permission.

Residents should be required to hold appropriate insurance cover that covers liability for damage or injury to others, prior to consent being given.

Residents should be required to ensure that mobility scooters are maintained in line with manufacturer recommendations, including storage, usage and charging.

Managers should ensure that appropriate maintenance and testing regimes are in place to ensure an designated storage areas are fit for purpose and offer effective fire protection, including:

- Fixed wiring installation testing
- Portable appliance testing of equipment

- Fire detection maintenance and testing
- Fire doors and fire door furniture
- Emergency lighting
- Ventilation
- Inspection of floors, walls or ceilings

Managers should ensure that appropriate reporting procedures exist so that relevant persons are able to report any incidents that could have an impact on the health, safety or welfare of other persons.

In the event of any fire incident involving a mobility scooter (however small), in addition to informing your local fire and rescue service, a report should be made to the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) who are responsible for regulating medical devices which includes mobility scooters. The make and model of the scooter involved will be required as well as the details of the incident.

To report an incident please visit the following website: <https://yellowcard.mhra.gov.uk/>

In addition, managers should ensure a review of the buildings fire risk assessment is made following any fire incident.

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