

A guide to safety in your home

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It is important for you to know how to live safely in your home, to protect yourself, your family and those around you.

This information is intended as a guide only.

You should seek expert advice from the appropriate organisations, such as the fire service, police service or utility companies, if you have any concerns or queries.

Fire safety

Your building has been designed and built with fire safety in mind. All homes and communal areas are fitted with at least one smoke alarm. Shared corridors in blocks of flats have self-closing fire doors designed to stop the spread of fire and smoke.

We carry out regular fire risk assessments of the shared areas of all our properties.

These are reviewed and updated every year.

If you notice any damaged fire safety equipment, please tell us straight away.

A fire can start when you least expect it, often during the night. There are a number of things you can do yourself to reduce the risk of a fire happening in your home.

Smoke alarms

Test all the smoke alarms in your property once a week, and fit new batteries when needed.

Please contact us if you are unsure how to test your smoke alarm.

If you live in a flat, or at one of our supported schemes, all shared corridors are fitted with smoke alarms, which we test regularly.

The smoke alarms will continue to work if the power is cut.



Exits

- **Keep the exits in your home clear so everyone can escape.** Make sure the door and window keys are easy to find.
- **Do not wedge self-closing doors open.** They should be kept closed to prevent fire and smoke spreading.
- **Decide on the easiest way out of your home and make sure everyone knows how to escape if there is a fire.** Before you open the door, check the door and handle with your hand. Never open the door if it feels warm, as there may be a fire on the other side.
- **If you live in a flat, you need to decide how to get to somewhere safe outside.** There may be a fire escape staircase nearer to your door than the main staircase.

Electrical equipment

- Switch off and unplug electrical equipment before you go to bed, except for appliances that are designed to be left on, like your fridge.
- Do not overload electrical sockets, use several adaptors if necessary.
- Do not pour or throw water on electrical appliances or a fire that has been caused by an electrical appliance.
- Be careful with cookers and appliances, as fires often start in kitchens.
- Check that plugs, leads and electrical equipment are safe and well-maintained. If you notice hot or scorched plugs or sockets, ask a qualified electrician to check your wiring.
- If you have an electrical fire in your home, pull out the plug at the wall or switch off the power at the fuse box.

In addition:

- ✓ Keep matches, lighters and candles out of the reach of children.
- ✓ Use a good fireguard, if required.
- ✗ Do not sit too close to a fire or heater.
- ✗ Do not dry clothes too close to heaters or fires.
- ✗ Do not put heaters or lamps near curtains or furniture.
- ✗ Ensure furniture is fire resistant.

What to do if a fire breaks out in your block or home

- Treat it seriously, do not assume it is a false alarm.
- Every flat is fitted with fire-resistant doors, so any fire can be contained for at least 30 minutes, which is enough time for the fire service to be called and arrive at the building.
- If you live in a house or flat and there is a fire in your own home, warn everyone living with you and get them out. Close the windows and door behind you. Warn your immediate neighbours if it is safe to do this.
- Leave the building using the staircase – do not use the lift.
- Find a safe place and dial 999
- If there is a fire outside your home in a communal area such as a corridor, it is usually safer to stay where you are until you can be evacuated. Block the bottom of doorways with blankets or coats to keep smoke out, stay low and get to a window, either opening it or breaking it if it won't open. Keep the door shut and dial 999 if you have a phone.
- If smoke or flames enter your home, leave at once and close the door behind you.

In addition:

- ✓ Keep calm and do not panic.
- ✗ Do not stop to pick up valuables.
- ✗ Do not investigate the fire or source of it.
- ✗ Do not try to put out the fire unless you can do so quickly and safely.
- ✗ Never return to a burning building.



Gas safety

All the gas appliances in your home should be safety checked once a year and serviced regularly to make sure they are working properly.

Homeowners

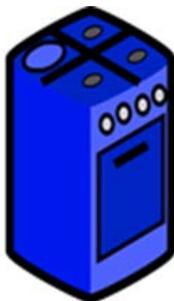
If you are a homeowner, you must arrange your own annual gas service and safety check. It's important to choose a Gas Safe registered engineer to carry out the safety check.

You can expect to pay around £50 for a gas safety check, and we advise you to get quotes from three different engineers before choosing someone to do the job.

For more information, or to search for certified engineers in your area, visit the Gas Safe Register website at www.gassaferegister.co.uk.

X You should not install your own gas-fired heating or hot water systems.

✓ Gas cookers must be installed by a recognised Gas Safe registered contractor.



Tenant

If you are a tenant living in one of our homes, we will visit you at least once a year to carry out a gas service and safety check. Even if the gas meter in your home has been turned off, we need to check the pipes to make sure there are no gas leaks.

What does the gas service and safety check involve?

When your next safety check is due, our gas contractor for your area will send you a letter with an appointment time. It is important that you keep the appointment. Please tell the contractor if the time is not convenient for you, so they can rearrange the appointment. If you are not at home when the contractor calls, they will leave a card and you will need to contact them to arrange another appointment. If you keep missing appointments we can take legal action to get into your home.

The safety check is free and takes about 40 minutes. We check and service your boiler, gas pipes and flues (pipes that take fumes outside). We will also check the connection to your gas cooker (if you have one), but not the cooker itself. You are responsible for this, unless we supplied you with it as part of your tenancy.

If you have a gas appliance that is not owned by us, you can ask our contractors to carry out its safety check. For more information, please contact us.

Once the check is complete, the contractor will give you a Landlord Gas Safety Record (LGSR). This means your appliances and fittings meet the correct safety standards.

Carbon monoxide

Carbon monoxide is a poisonous gas which can kill without warning as it is colourless and odourless. The early symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning are similar to flu and include headache, tiredness, shortness of breath, feeling sick and dizziness.

What to look out for

Check if your appliance has yellow or orange flames, soot or stains around it or if the pilot light frequently goes out. If you notice any of these things, or there is increased condensation inside your windows, your appliance may be faulty.

Protect yourself from carbon monoxide

- Install a carbon monoxide detector or alarm. These are available from DIY stores, are easy to install, and can cost as little as £10.
- Have your gas appliances checked once a year by a Gas Safe registered contractor.
- Keep air vents, outside grilles and air bricks free from obstructions.
- Do not use appliances if you think they are not working properly.
- Do not use portable fuel-burning camping equipment inside your home.
- Do not leave a car running in a garage, even with the garage door open.
- Do not use fuel-burning appliances in any room with closed windows or doors, or in any room where people are sleeping.

In an emergency

If you think there may be a gas leak in your home, you should:

- Turn off the gas supply at the meter.
- Do not use electrical switches including lights
- Check if a gas tap has been left on accidentally or if a pilot light has gone out.
- Do not use matches, candles, cigarettes or your gas cooker

Freephone 0800 111 999. Engineers will attend to the leak free of charge.



Asbestos

Asbestos is a material that was often used in buildings to reduce noise and protect homes against fire.

The use of asbestos was banned in the UK in 1999. However, a lot of our housing was built or refurbished before this time and some properties may contain asbestos materials. Products containing asbestos can look the same as those that do not, so you should always be careful.

How we manage asbestos

In line with legislation and the Health and Safety Executive's (HSE) guidance, it is our policy to leave asbestos-containing materials that are in good condition in place.

We ask our contractors to assess homes for asbestos during improvement or alteration work, and will tell you about any possible risks. We will make sure that any material containing asbestos is kept in a safe condition. If we need to remove any material containing asbestos from your home, we will use a specialist contractor.

The asbestos found in houses presents a low risk and is unlikely to harm your health.

It is important to remember that as long as asbestos-containing materials are in good condition they do not pose a significant risk to health.

Where might I find asbestos in my home?

Asbestos might be found outside your home in roof tiles, soffit boards, guttering and drainpipes or corrugated garage and shed roofs.

Inside your home, it might be found in many places, including textured wall and ceiling coatings such as Artex, service duct panels containing pipework, floor tiles and tile adhesive, linoleum with asbestos paper-backing, panels behind radiators or heaters, ceiling panels, boiler flue pipes, toilet cisterns, bath panels or water tanks.

What are the risks?

Asbestos-containing materials do not present a significant risk if they are kept in good condition. If it becomes damaged or its condition deteriorates, then you and others may be at risk. Old or damaged asbestos materials may release fibres into the air which could cause lung damage when breathed in.

What should I do?

Contact us immediately if you think you may have asbestos materials in your property.

Tell us if any materials you think may contain asbestos or have been told contain asbestos have become damaged.

Make sure that any asbestos material remains in good condition. Get our advice before carrying out any DIY work - you may need our permission for this in any case - and never disturb asbestos-containing materials.

- X Don't damage or drill, cut, scrape or sand any asbestos materials.**
- X Don't jet-wash or clean down corrugated garage or shed roofs containing asbestos.**
- X Don't remove old floor tiles or linoleum which may contain asbestos.**

Disposing of appliances that may contain asbestos

Some household appliances such as cookers, ironing board pads, fire blankets and oven gloves may contain asbestos. If you are planning to dispose of any of these items and think they may contain asbestos, please contact us for advice.

For more information about asbestos, visit www.gov.uk/asbestos-in-home

If you think materials in your home may contain asbestos, please contact us.

Water

Water is supplied by the water company through an underground service pipe. A stopcock located outside your building allows the water company to switch the water off in an emergency.

The mains stopcock inside your home controls the water as it enters your property. It is important that you know where the mains stopcock is and how to turn the water off in an emergency. If you do not know where the mains stopcock is, please contact us.

Burst pipes

If you have a burst pipe it is important to prevent water damage or flooding.

- ✓ Contact us as soon as possible.
- ✓ Turn off the water at the mains stopcock.
- ✓ Turn on all cold water taps to drain any remaining water from the system.
- ✗ Do not turn on hot water taps when draining tanks as this may cause more damage to the system.
- ✓ Wrap a cloth or something similar tightly around the leaking pipes, and put a bucket under the pipe if possible.
- ✓ Turn off the boiler and immersion heater. However, gas fires can still be used.
- ✓ Turn off electricity at the mains switch as water may have touched the electric system. Make sure a qualified electrician checks the whole system before turning the supply back on.

Water and cold weather

Cold weather can cause water pipes to freeze and crack.

- Make sure you know where your mains water stopcock is and that it works.
- Check that water tanks and pipes are insulated.
- Ensure your contents insurance covers you for any damage caused by water or flooding. For more information about insurance, please refer to our 'Insuring your property and contents' leaflet.

Please contact us if you need advice.

Frozen pipes

If the cold weather causes your pipes to freeze, you must check that the mains stopcock can be turned off to prevent leaks when the pipes thaw out.

- ✓ Allow warm air to circulate around the water tank and frozen pipes, but do not use an electrical appliance to do this.
- ✓ Turn off the mains stopcock when you are not using the drinking water supply.
- ✗ Do not use the central heating, use only the gas fire.
- ✓ If you have an electric immersion heater, switch it off.
- ✗ Do not use hot water taps until the water system has completely thawed.
- ✓ Make sure the pipes, tanks and overflows are thawed out before trying to clear any air locks in the water system.
- ✓ Please contact us if you need advice.

Overflow problems

Toilet cisterns are fitted with overflow pipes as safety outlets. These allow excess water to drain outside the building. A valve prevents the tank from over-filling. If the water tank is full and the valve is sticking or faulty, water continues to flow into the tank and the overflow pipe allows it to flow out.

If the cistern or tank overflows, try the following:

- Flush the toilet
- Press the ball-valve in the tank gently below the surface of the water and allow it to rise slowly. Do this several times
- Contact us for advice if the overflow continues to run.

Condensation, damp and mould

Condensation is caused by warm, moist air or water vapour when it comes into contact with cold surfaces.

It forms on outside walls, in the corner of some rooms, and in places where there is not much air movement and is most noticeable in kitchens and bathrooms.

Condensation can cause mould to grow on walls and ceilings and should be dealt with as soon as possible. It can cause damage to the structure of your home, your clothes, bedding, floor coverings and decorations.

Existing mould can be removed using a fungicidal wash, which you can get from DIY stores and supermarkets. Using fungicidal paints or wallpaper adhesive may also help prevent future problems.

To prevent condensation and mould forming:

- Make sure all air vents are clear.
- Open windows when cooking.
- Cover pans when cooking to prevent steam escaping.
- Avoid drying clothes on radiators.
- Leave trickle vents (slotted vents in the window frames) open when you are using a room.
- Use extractor fans in bathrooms and kitchens to circulate air.

For more information about preventing mould and condensation, visit your local council's website at <https://www.gov.uk/find-local-council>



Home security

You can help keep your home safe and secure by:

- closing your windows and doors at night and when you go out.
- checking the identity of callers before letting them in.
- closing shared doors, such as the front door.
- using plug-in timers for lamps.

If you live in our care and support accommodation, we carry out a yearly risk assessment of all our care and support accommodation, by looking for things that could cause a fire or an accident.

We will tell you before we do this, and ask if you think anything is at risk. You should report anything suspicious to your scheme manager or support worker, and tell them about any health and safety concerns.

Windows

Windows above ground floor level can be a safety hazard if left open, particularly to small children.

Report any faults with your windows immediately and keep them closed until they have been repaired.

Use window restrictors if they are fitted to your windows. This is a safety device which limits how far the window will open.

Door entry systems

Some of our homes have a door-entry system fitted. This allows you to open the main door for visitors by pressing the door-release button in your home.

- ✓ Always check the identity of people before you let them in. Do not let anyone into the building that you do not know or who you are not expecting.
- ✓ Keep the main door closed.
- ✓ Be aware of people trying to get into the building behind you.
- ✓ The door-entry system is important to the security of the building. Contact us immediately to report any problems with it.

At sheltered and extra-care schemes, a staff member holds a master key to open the front door to every home. This is only used in emergencies, or when workmen and support staff need to get in. If you have problems getting up to open your door, perhaps because you have difficulty moving or are ill, we will ask your permission before letting ourselves in.

Unless it is an emergency, our staff will not enter your home unless someone is there.

We do not recommend that you fit extra locks, bolts or chains to your front door, as the emergency services may not be able to get in. If we, or the emergency services, have to use force to get into your home, you may have to pay for the damage.

Protecting your home

There are many things you can do to protect yourself and your home:

- Cancel milk and newspapers if you go away for any length of time.
- Check the identity of visitors to your home. Police, council workers and utility workers all carry identity cards. Call the police if you are suspicious.
- Lock all windows and doors when you go to bed or when you are away from home.
- Do not put keys under the doormat outside your front door.
- Keep spare door keys in a safe place or with a trusted neighbour.
- Do not leave garden tools outside.

Insurance

You are responsible for insuring the contents of your home against theft, loss or damage.

You may also be responsible for damage caused to your neighbours' property, if it is found to be your fault.

For more information about insurance, please refer to our 'Insuring your property and contents' leaflet.

Protecting your identity

Identity theft is a growing concern, but there are several things you can do to prevent someone else from using your identity:

- Shred all bank statements, salary information and anything containing your name and address.
- Ask the Post Office to redirect your mail if you move home.
- Do not give your personal details to unknown callers or email companies or when you could be overheard.
- Keep your personal documents at home in a safe place and do not carry them with you.
- Keep your bank/credit card and PIN safe. Your bank will never phone to ask for your PIN.
- Delete suspicious emails without opening them if you don't recognize who they are from.
- Make sure you use safe websites when buying things online



Avoiding accidents in your home

Avoid accidents in your home by taking a few simple steps:

- ✓ Wear suitable shoes indoors.
- ✓ Make sure carpets and rugs are secure and can't trip you up.
- ✓ Make sure there are no trailing cables, toys or other objects on the floor or stairs.
- ✗ Don't carry loads that are too heavy and could make you lose your balance.
- ✓ Use hand rails or walking aids, if required.

Abuse and antisocial behavior

We believe that everyone has the right to live as they wish, as long as they do not spoil others' quality of life.

We take abuse and antisocial behavior very seriously and aim to reduce the risk of residents being abused, and to stop abuse when it does happen.

We work with you and with local councils, health and social services, the Care Quality Commission and the police to do this.

For more information, please refer to our 'Antisocial behaviour' leaflet, which gives you advice on what to do about abuse and antisocial behaviour. Contact us if you need further advice.

Home emergency plan

We recommend that you have an emergency plan in case of an accident or to escape from your home in case of a fire or other emergency.

- Keep personal documents in a safe place so they are easily accessible in emergencies. We advise you keep photocopies of them in a separate place.
- Go through the plan with others living with you so that everyone knows what to do and who to contact in an emergency.

Things to consider include:

- Planning an escape route and making sure all exits are always clear.
- Producing a list of who needs to escape and where they are at the time.
- Producing a list of who to contact in an emergency, such as the police, fire service, ambulance, and gas and electricity suppliers as well as other useful contacts, such as your doctor, family and friends.
- Producing a list of passport numbers, driving licences, and bank details in case personal documents are stolen.

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