

FIRE SAFETY FAQ'S

Q. WHAT ARE THE BASIC PRINCIPLES OF FIRE PREVENTION?

For a fire to start, three things are needed. These things are known as the 'fire triangle', or 'triangle of combustion':

1. **Fuel** - paper, plastic etc.
2. **Heat** - a naked flame, electrical spark etc.
3. **Oxygen** - which is in the air around us.

Fire safety is based on keeping these three things apart as, without all three, a fire can't exist. As oxygen is all around us, we usually try and keep heat away from a fuel, or something that will burn. Heat is safe as long as it doesn't come into contact with fuel and fuels are safe as long as they don't come into contact with heat.

Q. WHAT ARE THE BASIC PRINCIPLES OF FIRE SAFETY IN BLOCKS OF FLATS?

If a fire starts, solid walls and sturdy doors that close fully into their frame will stop it spreading for a time. Fire safety is based on holding back a fire until either the fire service arrive and fight it, (known as 'stay put'), or for people to leave the building it is in, along what are known as 'means of escape' routes.

Our flats have fire resisting floors, walls, ceilings and entrance doors, but there is no point having a fire resisting door that is open at the time of a fire, so please make sure entrance doors are closed. We fit what are known as a 'self-closers' which should fully close the door into the frame. We also fit smoke seals around the edge of the door to stop smoke passing between the door and frame.

Floors between flats will usually hold back a fire for at least 1 hour, whilst walls, doors and glazing will generally hold it back for at least 30 minutes. This means that if a fire starts in another flat, the safest thing for you to do is to stay in your flat and wait until the fire service puts it out. If lots of people all try to leave at the same time, this stops the fire service getting to the fire and can mean people get hurt.

Q. WHY ARE THERE FIRE NOTICES IN COMMUNAL AREAS?

You should know the fire routine in your scheme or block, and have your own fire action plans, so notices are mostly for visitors. They are good as a reminder, but it is far better to read and understand them when you first move in, rather than try to follow when there is a fire.

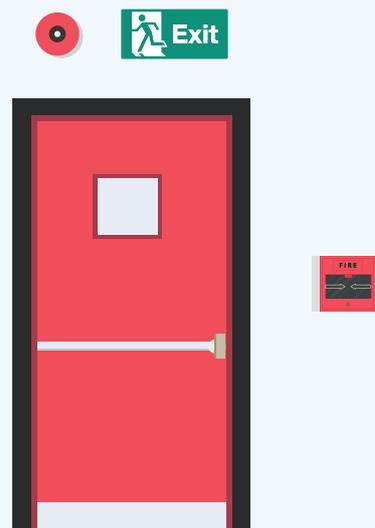


Q. DO I NEED TO USE MY WINDOWS TO ESCAPE FROM A FIRE?

Building regulations state that certain windows must be able to open enough to escape a fire through, but you should never need to use your windows if you follow the advice. Wherever you live, always try to keep escape routes, such as stairs, landings, corridors, hallways etc. free from things that could burn, or that you could trip over. That way, a fire should only ever start in a room where you can close the door and leave.

Communal areas in blocks or schemes should ALWAYS be clear of obstructions or items that can burn, including walking frames and wheelchairs. Someone could trip over these things, or they could get knocked, moved and lost.

Some small non-combustible items are allowed in communal areas, but you MUST ask your customer partner, homeownership specialist, scheme manager or fire and safety assessor if you don't know what is allowed.



Q. WHY CAN'T I HEAR THE FIRE ALARM IN MY FLAT?

Flats with 'stay put' policies can be thought of as individual homes. This means that if there is a fire in your own home, you need to know about it so you can plan what to do, but if there is a fire in someone else's home, you don't need to know about it unless the fire service ask you to evacuate.

That means, in many schemes and blocks, there might only be a fire alarm in your home, not in the communal area. Where there is an alarm, this is meant to alert people in the communal area only, not people in their own homes. The safest place for anyone within their own home is to stay there, if the stay put policy applies to your scheme.

In the next few years, a new alarm system will start to appear in certain blocks. It is called an 'evacuation alert system' which you will be able to hear in your flat. It is not a fire alarm, in that it doesn't automatically sound if there is a fire, it is for the fire and rescue service only to use if they need to evacuate certain people. There are usually controls for these on each floor.

Q. WHAT IF THERE IS A FIRE IN THE FLAT BELOW ME?

Floors between flats are designed to contain a fire for at least an hour. This means flames and smoke should not get in your flat through the floor, and it shouldn't get hot and set fire to items in your flat. If windows are open, smoke could enter your flat.

If you do not feel comfortable, you can evacuate to somewhere safe and, if possible, let the fire service or other persons dealing with the incident know where you are. If smoke or flames are not affecting you, the safest place is to stay in your own home, but have your 'fire action plan' ready in case you need to evacuate.

Q. WHAT IS A FIRE ACTION PLAN?

A fire action plan is what it sounds like – a plan of the actions you and your family or visitors would take in a fire. Every home should have one, no matter whether flat or house. Consider which doors you will use to leave, which escape routes to take, other routes in case one is blocked and where to go once outside.

It is also a good idea to plan a night time routine before going to bed. This might include emptying all waste bins into the outside bin, unplugging electrical items not in use, making sure heaters and gas appliances are fully switched off, and making sure all doors are closed and your escape routes are clear.

Q. WHY DON'T WE HAVE FIRE EXTINGUISHERS?

Because they can cause harm if not used properly. The safest thing to do is to walk away from a fire and close doors behind you. You need training to use a fire extinguisher and they can be dangerous if you don't know what you are doing. For example, carbon dioxide extinguishers for electrical fires can cause severe frost burns and asphyxiation.

A very small fire, in a waste bin for instance, can often be extinguished quickly and safely and won't generally need a fire extinguisher. A fire blanket or even a cup of water will do. Always make sure the exit is behind you so that you can get away from the fire if you can't put it out.

Q. WHAT ARE EWS1 FORMS AND DO WE NEED ONE?

Not all cladding is dangerous, just three main types. EWS1 forms are not law. They were brought in to help with mortgage valuations and surveys to make sure that external wall systems, such as cladding, were assessed if they were thought to be a risk, and if one of the three main types of more dangerous cladding is in use.

Buildings that contain two or more residential properties (except single private dwellings) require a fire risk assessment, which must include consideration of external fire spread. It is not always necessary to enter customers' homes to undertake this.

Unfortunately, this isn't always understood and we've been asked for EWS1 forms when not needed. New advice has since been produced by the Royal Institute for Chartered Surveyors, which explains when a valuer or lender might ask for more details from a qualified expert, over and above what is in the Fire Risk Assessment.

All our blocks over 18m in height have been thoroughly surveyed. We are replacing some cladding which, although not one of the more dangerous types, didn't fully comply with standards introduced in 2019. All our blocks have fire risk assessments, carried out by our own fire and safety assessors. These include assessments of external fire spread and the type of wall system. Any requests by mortgage lenders for EWS1 forms in properties below 18m are provided with the latest copy of the fire risk assessment, as per government advice.

We recognise that this has caused uncertainty in the market for our homeowners and shared owners, but assure you that we take your safety extremely seriously indeed. Further advice and guidance is available from your homeownership specialist or regional fire and safety assessor.