

FIRE SAFETY

SUMMARY

- This LAN is not a guide to the fire safety in a particular block of flats. Your landlord or managing agent should have issued you with the correct advice which is applicable to your block.
- That advice may be in a leaflet or as a fire safety notice posted in the common parts.
- This LAN explains some general guidance about fire safety that applies to all blocks of flats.

MOST FIRES IN BLOCKS OF FLATS START WITHIN THE FLATS

- Electrical faults for example from overloaded sockets are the most common cause.
- Cigarettes that have not been put out properly.
- Cigarettes smoked by someone leaning out of a window and throwing the butt away may end in an open window of a neighbour's flat.
- Chip and frying pan fires are caused when someone forgets to turn off the gas.
- Fragranced candles are popular but make sure they are extinguished when leaving a room, when leaving the flat or retiring to bed.

PREVENTING FIRES IN YOUR FLAT

The best protection from fire is prevention. Your landlord and managing agent have a duty to take steps to prevent fires in common parts but you can ensure your home is as safe as possible too. Remember most fires in blocks of flats start within a flat not in the common parts.

- Have you got smoke detectors? These are the most effective way of preventing fires and also give vital early warning and extra time to escape. Mains wired detectors are the safest.
- Install smoke detectors and test them weekly.

- If not mains wired, change the battery every year or when you need to (unless it is a ten year alarm)
- Change the smoke detector every 10 years.
- Are the doors in your flat in good condition and do they shut properly? Never remove internal doors or wedge them open.
- If you are planning alterations to doors and the internal layout of your flat, do think about the implication for fire safety. Contact your landlord or agent first.
- Close internal doors at night.
- Make sure everyone knows where you keep the keys for the main door.

FRONT DOORS OF FLATS

Your front door is a vital part of the fire safety of the block, not just for you but also your neighbours. It protects fire and smoke from spreading to the common parts, and obstructing the escape route for the block. Do not alter it without taking advice on the implications for fire safety and seeking permission from your landlord or agent.

Your front door should have a self-closing device fitted to it to meet relevant fire safety guidance for flats - please do not remove it.

Do not change the letter box or add a cat flap without considering the question of fire safety of your flat and the common escape routes.

FIRE SAFETY AND THE COMMON PARTS OF FLATS

Your landlord or agent has a legal duty to arrange for a fire risk assessment to be carried out for the common parts and for it to be kept under review. See below. But there are things you can do to help in addition to fire safety in common parts.

- Do not obstruct the common parts, the escape route for the block.
- Do not prop open common area fire doors.
- Do not litter the stairs, corridors and landing with goods or anything that can set fire easily.
- Do not store prams, bicycles or mobility scooters in common parts without the permission of the landlord or agent. Permission will be denying if the fire safety of the block is put at risk.

- If you see things in common parts that do not belong there, move them or report them to the landlord or agent.
- Do not store combustible materials in cupboards that have electrical distribution boards.
- Do not leave rubbish in the refuse store that is not put away in bins. Loose material is easily used to set fire to common parts.

SOME PRINCIPLES OF FIRE SAFETY IN BLOCKS OF FLATS

There are many misunderstandings about the fire safety of flats. Most purpose built flats and modern conversions are designed with certain principles in mind as follows:

- There is a high degree of compartmentation between each flat and between flats and the common parts. Each flat is a fire resisting box.
- There is a low probability of fire spread beyond the flat of origin.
- There is a low fire risk in common areas.

If these design principles are in place then the following fire safety principles will apply, subject of course to the fire risk assessment of each block.

- A stay put policy will apply. This means that unless the fire breaks out in your flat, it is safest to stay in your flat unless you are asked to leave by the fire brigade.
- There is no need for simultaneous evacuation or for fire drills.
- Residents in the flats of fire origin should evacuate and call the fire service - other residents are safe to stay in their flats.
- There is no need for fire alarms in common areas or linked into flats.
- There is no need for fire extinguishers in common parts except for plant and service rooms.
- Emergency lighting is generally required in common parts stairs and corridors, plant and service rooms.

THE FIRE RISK ASSESSMENT OF COMMON PARTS

It has been a legal requirement for all blocks of flats (including houses converted into two flats) to have a fire risk assessment since 2006. This is an assessment of the common parts only but may include the front

door of flats whoever owns them. The responsibility to arrange for the risk assessment lies with the landlord and that may be a Residents Management Company or Right to Manage Company.

Arising from the fire risk assessment a fire action plan should be produced for that block that states the necessary fire safety arrangements and includes any steps that should be taken to improve fire safety in the block.

In addition your landlord or agent should communicate to all residents what the fire safety arrangements are for the block. In the simplest of blocks a standard fire safety notice affixed in the common parts can suffice but otherwise a bespoke document may be needed which is copied to all residents.

If you are not sure of the fire safety plan for your block contact your landlord, resident management company or agent.

FURTHER INFORMATION

The current national guidance on fire safety titled 'Fire Safety in Purpose-Built Blocks of Flats' is free to download from the publications page ARMA's Website -
www.arma.or.uk/public/h/downloadable_publications