



## Private Sector Housing Hazard Fact Sheet

### FALLING ON THE LEVEL



#### Who we are and what we do:

Private Sector Housing are responsible for making sure that properties both owner occupied and privately rented comply with Housing law and standards to protect customers from hazards of poor housing.

To achieve this we will assess dwellings under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System to evaluate any potential risks to health and safety from any deficiencies found. The more common hazards that we come across in dwellings are damp and mould growth; excess cold; crowding and space; entry by intruders; personal hygiene, sanitation and drainage; **falling on the level**; falling on stairs; falling between levels; fire; and structural collapse and falling elements. If significant hazards are identified in privately rented properties which are attributable to the condition of the property, then we may require remedial action by landlords to reduce or eliminate the risk from these hazards.

The intention of our fact sheets is to help you understand what we are looking for, and where possible, to identify areas where landlords and tenants may be able to help minimise or reduce risk.

#### Health Effects

This fact sheet covers falling on any level surface such as floors, yards and paths. It also includes falls associated with trip steps, thresholds, or ramps, where the change in level is less than 300mm.

Falls can result in physical injury such as bruising, fractures, head, brain and spinal injuries. The nature of injury is in part dependent on the distance of a fall, and in part dependent on the nature of the surface onto which the victim falls. While falls on the level tend to result in relatively minor injuries than other falls, they occur more frequently.

#### Causes of falls on level surfaces

The construction, evenness, inherent slip resistance, drainage (for outdoor path surfaces), and maintenance of the floor or path surface all affect the likelihood of a fall and the severity of any injury. Other factors such as lighting, temperature, lack of sufficient space to carry out a task, and distracting noise may also have an affect.

Surface variations of 5mm to floors and 20mm to paths and yards increase the likelihood of a trip. The possibility of a slip occurring is affected by both the slip resistance of the floor surface and the characteristics of any footwear. Slip resistance is worsened when a surface is damp or wet, which may be the result of a building deficiency, or be due to the purpose of the area in question, for example: kitchens, bathrooms and utility rooms.



#### What preventative measures can landlords and home owners take?

Ensure that there is effective drainage of surface water for outdoor paths and yards to prevent a fall because of ponding of water or patches of ice in inclement weather.

Ensure that any paths, yards, drying areas, communal areas, doorways and floors are as level as is reasonably practicable, well maintained and kept in a sound condition.

Remove trip hazards where reasonably practicable and if they cannot be removed, make the occupants aware of the hazard through signage, or by highlighting the hazard through additional lighting; warning tape or paint.

In common parts within multi occupied buildings, the owner or manager is responsible for the floor coverings such as carpets; laminates and sheet vinyl as well as the other factors already discussed.

Cold impairs movement and sensation, and a lowered body temperature affects mental functioning, such that falls are more likely in the cold. Ensure that the thermal efficiency of the dwelling allows for a healthy indoor temperature to be maintained throughout, by improving thermal insulation and provision and maintenance of heating system.

Provide and maintain internal and external artificial lighting to enable users to identify any obstructions and trip steps or projecting thresholds.

### **What preventative measures can tenants and owner occupiers take?**

Arrange furniture and household items to allow sufficient space to all rooms and parts of the dwelling so as to allow for freedom of movement without increasing the chances of a trip or slip.

Use artificial lighting when necessary to illuminate internal and external parts of the dwelling. Ensure that any blown or missing light bulbs are replaced. Good lighting will enable you to identify any obstructions and trip steps or projecting thresholds.

Cold impairs movement and sensation, and a lowered body temperature affects mental functioning, such that falls are more likely in the cold. Set controls of the heating system to provide a comfortable indoor temperature at all times. This is of particular importance during cold weather.

### **Other useful contacts and sources:**

Website: <http://www.colchester.gov.uk/privatesectorhousing> - Private Sector Housing pages for Homeowners, Landlords and tenants

Colchester Borough Council's Building Control Section at [building.control@colchester.gov.uk](mailto:building.control@colchester.gov.uk) or by telephoning 01206 282436

Building Regulations *Approved Document A: Structure*, and British Standards *BS 5385 and 6431*

## **Private Sector Housing**

### **Colchester Borough Council**

Rowan House, 33 Sheepen Road, Colchester CO3 3WG

Telephone: Customer Service Centre on 01206 282581 and select Option 6

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