



Private Sector Housing Hazard Fact Sheet

FIRE



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 dampness 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.

This fact sheet is intended 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

The most common cause of death from a fire is being overcome by smoke and gas.

While death is the most serious outcome of a fire, medical treatment is often required for minor burns, smoke inhalation, and injuries received during escape from a building (cuts, abrasions, broken bones etc.)

Causes of fire

Occupant behaviour is a major factor in relation to fires starting. Most accidental fires in dwellings result from occupier carelessness or misuse of equipment or appliances, smokers' materials and matches etc. The main sources of ignition attributable to the dwelling, rather than the occupiers, are cooking appliances, space heaters and electrical distribution equipment.

There is a greater risk of fire occurring in multi-occupied buildings, particularly those over two storeys in height and therefore a much higher level of fire safety is required. An adult living in either a self-contained flat or bed-sit accommodation in a building of three storeys or more is roughly 10 times more likely to die in a fire than an adult living in a two storey house.



What measures can landlords and home owners take to improve fire safety?

Properly working alarms connected to smoke or heat detectors probably do most to save lives in the event of a fire. Ensure that there is an effective and reliable form of automatic smoke detection in the dwelling. Mains wired alarms should be installed as their failure rate is much lower than battery powered alarms.

Ensure that the design, construction and condition of the dwelling limits the chances of carelessness causing a fire, the spread of a fire and provides safe and ready means of escape. Internal doors (including entrance doors to flats) should be made of appropriate materials and properly fitted.

Ensure that fitted appliances and equipment which prevent a possible source of ignition are correctly and safely installed and maintained. The space for siting cookers should be safe, with no flammable materials immediately adjacent or close to windows where curtains may be hung.

Ensure that all fixed heating appliances and systems, whether central heating or not, are properly designed, installed and regularly serviced and maintained. Ensure that the means of space heating to the dwelling is adequate for the whole dwelling to discourage the need for and use of supplementary portable heaters.

Provide sufficient and appropriately sited electric socket outlets to help reduce the need for extension leads and the overloading of sockets. Ensure that the electrical installation (consumer unit, wiring etc.) meets with current requirements and that it is properly installed, maintained and regularly checked and tested. There should be no defects to sockets or switches. Any portable electrical appliances (plug in appliances) that you provide for use by your tenant must be regularly checked and tested to ensure that they are safe for use.

Landlords should contact the Private Sector Housing Team at Colchester Borough Council for advice regarding fire safety in dwellings, particularly with regard to houses in multiple occupation. Requirements are made by the Council in line with the safety guidance issued by LACoRS (Local Authorities Coordinators of Regulatory Services) for fire safety in housing.

What measures can tenants and owner occupiers take to improve fire safety?

Avoid drying clothes over or near to potential ignition sources such as heaters.

Check and test smoke alarms regularly to ensure that they are in working order.

Many fires in the home start at night. Make sure you have a bedtime fire safety routine to help you and your family keep safe. Switch off and unplug all electrical appliances not designed to stay on and make sure all smoking materials are put out.

Cooking accidents are the most common cause of accidental fires in the home. Most of these fires are started by people leaving pans of food unattended, leaving the cooker on after preparation of a meal or by leaving tea towels etc, too close to the cooker. Pans for food should not be left unattended to cook and cookers should be turned off before the kitchen is left.

Ensure the flex from kettles or other kitchen appliances are kept away from cookers. All electrical appliances such as kettles, toasters and irons should be switched off at the plug when not in use.

In the event of a fire, you may have to get out in dark and difficult conditions. It will be a lot easier if you have already planned and rehearsed your escape route and know where to go. Your planned escape route should stay free of any obstructions, loose floor coverings, or anything else that could be a hindrance.

Useful contacts and sources:

Essex Fire and Rescue Service

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 or by telephoning 01206 282436.

Building Regulation *Approved Document B*, and British Standards *BS5588*, *Code of Practice 5839*, and *BS5446*.

Private Sector Housing

Colchester Borough Council

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

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Email: housing.private@colchester.gov.uk