



Private Sector Housing Hazard Fact Sheet

STRUCTURAL COLLAPSE & FALLING ELEMENTS



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 category covers the threat of whole dwelling collapse, or of an element or a part of the fabric being displaced or falling because of inadequate fixing, disrepair, or as a result of adverse weather conditions. Structural failure may occur internally or externally within the curtilage threatening occupants, or externally outside the curtilage putting at risk members of the public.

Objects falling from the fabric of a building and as a result causing injury are extremely rare. Potential injuries range from minor bruising to death.

Causes

Externally, the causes of injury range from falling slates, eaves gutters, bricks or windows, to collapse of walls. Internally it includes floor, ceiling and staircase collapse.

The most common incident is for a fixture, such as a light fitting or kitchen cabinet, to fall from the ceiling or wall, because of a combination of poor fixings and vibration. However, the most common part of the fabric of buildings to fall and injure someone is ceiling plaster. Being hit by chimney pots and roof slates/tiles is much more rare.



What preventative measures can landlords and home owners take?

Ensure that all elements of the structure of dwellings are properly maintained to ensure they remain safe and stable. In some instances it may be necessary to commission investigations by a structural engineer.

The foundations and load bearing external walls should be designed, constructed and maintained to be of sufficient strength to support the weight of the building, fittings, furnishings and its users. Any disrepair should not interfere with structural integrity. Any external cladding, rendering or similar finishing and any coping should be securely fixed and in good repair.

All openings to external walls should be properly constructed and maintained to provide for proper distribution of the load above. Lintels should be of sufficient strength and be maintained in repair. Frames to openings and doors and windows should be securely fixed and maintained in good repair.

All external balconies and walkways should be designed, constructed and maintained so as to be capable of supporting their own weight and the imposed loads (such as plant pots) and persons.

The roof structure should be designed, constructed and maintained so as to be strong enough to support the weight of the covering, be securely fixed and to cope with wind and weather imposed loads. Roof coverings should be securely fixed and maintained in good repair. Chimney stacks should be properly constructed and maintained and pots securely fixed.

All external pipework and eaves gutters should be securely fixed and properly maintained. Eaves gutters should be capable of coping with the weight imposed by typical snowfalls.

Floors should be designed, constructed and maintained to be of sufficient strength to support their own weight and that of imposed loads including furniture, fixtures, fittings (including facilities such as baths and WC basins) and occupants. Staircases should be designed, constructed and maintained to be of sufficient strength to support their own weight and that of imposed loads including occupants and furniture likely to be carried up and down.

Ceilings should be designed, constructed, fixed and maintained to be strong enough to remain intact.

Internal walls should be designed, constructed and maintained to be strong enough to support their own weight and any loads reasonably expected. Such loads could include upper floors and ceilings, shelves, pictures, light fittings, equipment, facilities and fixtures. Door frames and openings should be properly fixed and maintained and capable of supporting the doors.

Fittings and fixtures (such as electric lights, kitchen wall-cupboards and showers) should be properly and securely fixed.

What preventative measures can tenants and owner occupiers take?

There are no specific measures that you as a tenant can take to prevent injury from structural collapse of falling elements at a dwelling. The maintainance of the structural elements of the dwelling and fittings within will be the responsibility of your landlord or owner of the property.

If you become aware of any disrepair to the dwelling internally or externally you should make your landlord or managing agent aware of this, so that they can arrange for any inspection and necessary remedial action to be carried out.

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 or by telephoning 01206 282436

Building Regulations Part A and *Approved Document*

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

Fax: 01206 282598

Email: housing.private@colchester.gov.uk