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Fire Safety in Flats

Advice for Tenants and Leaseholders

Epping Forest District Council has worked with Essex County Fire & Rescue Service to produce this information for residents to ensure safety in the event of a fire.



Fire safety in your home and communal areas

Fire is one of the biggest killers in the home. It is important for your own safety to understand what to do in the event of a fire, whether it is in your flat or somewhere else in the building.

Fire action advice

If there is a fire in your flat:

- Get out and stay out taking all other occupants with you.
- Call the Fire Service on 999.
- Do not take risks.
- Close all doors and windows behind you as you leave, if safe to do so, to contain the fire.
- Walk calmly down the nearest stairs or through the nearest fire exit and wait in a safe position away from the building.
- Do not use the lift(s).
- Do not return to your flat until you have been told it is safe to do so by the Fire Service.

We operate a **stay put** policy which has been agreed and is recommended by Essex Fire and Rescue Service (further details can be found on the Fire Action Notice Board). This means that unless the fire is in your flat, you should stay in the flat unless it is safe for you to get out and stay out.

If you are trapped in your flat by a fire:

- If a smoke alarm sounds do not open any doors that feel warm.
- Get everyone into one room that is furthest away from the smoke and heat in your flat and close the door.
- Call the Fire Service on 999.
- Do not take risks.
- Block the bottom of the door(s) with blankets, coats or wet towels if possible.

- If you are near the window, open it to get air and to let the Fire Service see you.
- If the Fire Service consider it safer for you to evacuate the building, they will tell you to leave.

Smoke alarms

Smoke alarms save lives. They are warning devices that detect the early stages of a fire. If there is a fire in your home the smoke alarm sounds a piercing alarm to warn you, giving you vital extra time to escape.

You should test your alarms on a weekly basis to ensure they are working properly. Report any faults immediately to the Housing Repairs Service on 01992 564199 (please choose option 1).



NEVER disconnect or remove your smoke alarm.

NEVER cover the detector.

NEVER remove the batteries unless you are replacing them immediately (they need replacing every year).

There have been some instances whereby, for various reasons, residents have removed the whole smoke-detector unit from the mains supply. This renders the alarm useless and places them and others at risk. Smoke alarms should be tested, not removed.

If you have an individual gas boiler in your property, the Council will test your smoke alarm for free when the gas boiler is serviced. It is important you arrange access for this annual test and service promptly.

If your smoke alarm sounds, never assume it is a false alarm.

It is against the law to smoke in the communal areas in blocks of flats.

Preventing fires

Follow these tips to help prevent fires in your home:

- Ensure cigarettes are put out properly - more people die in fires caused by smoking and smoking related products than in fires caused by anything else; better still, go outside to smoke.
- Use candles carefully and make sure they are in a fireproof holder kept away from children, pets, curtains or paper.
- Chip pans cause a fifth of all accidental fires in the home - try to avoid cooking with chip pans. If using a chip pan never fill more than 1/3 full. Never leave them unattended, even if the doorbell rings.
- Microwave cooking – always check the packaging of ready meals as some may use foil containers which are not suitable for heating in a microwave.
- Poorly wired appliances are a real danger - check regularly that wiring is in good condition.
- Electrical sockets – do not overload plug sockets.
- Put all rubbish in the external bins provided. Bulky items can be removed by the Council. You can book your bulky item collection at www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk.
- If you have a gas boiler, make sure the Council's Gas Safe registered engineer is given access to service it once a year. Remember, they will test your smoke alarm for free at the same time.
- Barbecues – the Fire Service advises you not to use 'balcony barbecues' and Council policy prohibits you from having gas bottles on balconies. If you do have a barbecue, ensure you place it well away from the building or anything that could catch fire. Have a bucket of water or sand nearby for emergencies.

Electric blankets

About 5,000 fires a year are caused by old or faulty electric blankets.

Make sure your blanket is safe. All electric blankets should carry the British Standard Kitemark (BSK) and the British Electrotechnical Approvals Board (BEAB) symbol on them. Have your blanket checked by an expert once every three years, or as recommended by the manufacturer. Essex Trading Standards will test your blanket free of charge.

Never use hot water bottles in the same bed as an electric blanket, even if the blanket is switched off. Water and electricity do not mix.



Fire at night

You are more at risk from a fire when asleep. If you do not have a working smoke alarm, there will be nothing to wake you.

Know your escape route in case you need to use it in the night and close your internal doors before going to bed.



Things to check at night before you go to bed;

- Close all internal doors, especially the kitchen door to stop a fire spreading.
- Switch off electrical heaters, blankets, TVs. and other items that do not need to run all night.
- Put out cigarettes and any candles safely.
- Make sure exits are clear.
- Keep door and window keys where everybody can find them.



What we do to keep you safe

We carry out Fire Risk Assessments for all communal areas of your block.

We also carry out regular inspections of all blocks of flats.

For your own safety, the Council does not allow you to store any items in the communal areas. Where personal belongings are found to be obstructing communal areas, residents will be asked to remove these items immediately, or within seven days (a few exceptions are listed below):

- pictures hung on the wall (no glass);
- rubber backed (non-slip) mats outside front entrance doors;
- flame-retardant curtains at windows; and
- non-flammable items such as small plant pots (placed in recesses but not on window sills).

Vulnerable residents

If you or anyone who lives with you would have difficulty leaving the building in the event of a fire, please contact your Housing Management Officer to discuss your needs.



How you can help

Do not block your escape route.

Keep your communal areas clean, tidy and free from refuse and obstruction at all times. Items left in communal areas can pose a serious risk to safety in the event of fire. They can prevent people from leaving the building and can obstruct the Fire Service from gaining access.

If you have a large item such as a pushchair, bike or mobility scooter placed in any corridors, landings or stairways please contact your Housing Management Officer to discuss how we can ensure it is stored safely.



When buying or replacing furniture make sure it contains fire retardant foam rather than polyurethane foam.

Never prop or wedge fire communal doors open.

Storage

Your storage solution should not increase fire risks.

The Fire Service are experiencing serious fires, injuries and deaths as a result of excessive accumulation of materials in homes.

Storing too many possessions in your home poses a significant threat to Fire Officers fighting fires and can also increase the risk of fire spreading to your neighbours' homes. So, if you feel you have too much clutter, have a clear out - your home will be safer for it.

The policy on;

Mobility scooters:

In order to comply with Fire Regulations, mobility scooters, motorised wheelchairs and other motorised mobility vehicles **must not be stored or charged in communal areas under any circumstances.**



If you do not have suitable storage in the block, then you must store the scooter inside your home.

The use of common areas for storage:

A 'zero tolerance' approach is taken by the Council in which residents are not permitted to use the common areas to store or dispose of their belongings. No exceptions apply. This is to ensure that the common areas are free of combustible material, ignition sources and obstructions.



This also includes storing personal items in communal cupboards.

Fire doors:

In order to save lives, fire doors must work correctly.

Never tamper with a fire door and do not wedge open the lobby door and/or any fire door including your kitchen door.



Self-closing devices need to be fitted to all fire doors and should not be removed.

Think ahead

- Prepare your fire escape plan - practising a plan of action will help you to act quickly if there is a fire. Everyone who lives in your flat should know this plan.
- The best escape route is the normal way in and out of your home so make sure it is always kept free of obstacles.
- Think of a second route in case the first route is blocked and review your plan if the layout of your home changes.
- If there are children, older or disabled people or pets in your household, plan how they will get out.
- Think of, and plan for, any difficulties you may have getting out. For example, at night you may need to use a torch to light your way.
- Decide where the keys to doors and windows should be kept and always keep them there. Make sure everyone in your household knows where they are.
- Whenever you leave your property ensure that you have not left anything on charge or standby and check that your cooker and heaters are turned off.
- Familiarise yourself with the Fire Action Notices displayed on the walls in the communal areas.
- Consider purchasing a fire blanket for the kitchen as kitchen fires can devastate homes. Fire blankets are readily available and can extinguish small fires before they take hold.

Book a home safety visit

You can find more home fire safety guidance on the Essex County Fire and Rescue Service website;
www.essex-fire.gov.uk

They also offer a free home fire safety visit for people living in Essex. Uniformed officers will visit your home to provide information and answer your questions about fire safety.

To arrange a free visit call 0300 303 0088 or visit the website and book online.



**Call the Fire Service on 999.
Never assume that someone has already done it.
You could save lives.**

If you need this document in an alternative format contact:

housinginfo@eppingforestdc.gov.uk

**Epping Forest District Council,
Housing and Property Services,
Civic Offices, High Street,
Epping, Essex CM16 4BZ.**

www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk

01992 564000

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