

FIRE SAFETY:

DON'T GET CAUGHT OUT

BY THE REGULATIONS AND YOUR OBLIGATIONS

The following guide to fire safety will ensure that you keep your tenants safe, property protected and avoid being named and shamed as a rogue landlord.

SMOKE AND CARBON MONOXIDE ALARMS

Early warnings of fire are important in helping all residents evacuate safely and call for help. The law has finally caught up and requires a minimum of one smoke alarm on each floor of your rental property.

Carbon monoxide alarms are now also required in any rooms with a solid fuel burning appliance.

FireProtectionOnline.co.uk suggests installing carbon monoxide alarms if you have gas appliances in your property, even though it is not mandatory. This is because a faulty gas appliance can also be a source of the harmful carbon monoxide.

At the start of each new tenancy, you must check that all alarms are working, and then make sure that your tenants are aware of their responsibilities.

If you have battery alarms, the tenants should change the batteries every six months and test them weekly. As you cannot rely on them doing so, you have two other options: Firstly, you could purchase long-life battery alarms that have a ten-year guarantee. All you'll need to do is change the smoke alarm every ten years, which you should do anyway.

Secondly, you could have the alarms wired into the mains electricity, which also contains a life-long battery. This means the alarm will still work, even if there is a power cut.

Regardless of which system you use, you need to fit the right type of sensors. Installing a heat sensor in the kitchen will mean that your tenants have fewer false alarms when they are cooking. Optical smoke alarms are also less sensitive to cooking fumes, which makes them ideal.

If you don't meet the smoke and carbon monoxide alarms requirement, you could be hit with a £5,000 fine.

Statistically, someone living in a rental property is seven times more likely to experience a house fire than a homeowner. With that in mind, fit alarms immediately if you haven't already – they are just as essential as a lock on the front door.

GAS SAFETY

Gas leaks can cause all sorts of serious hazards. As a responsible landlord, you should have carbon monoxide alarms fitted. Not only is the dangerous gas produced by burning solid fuel, but also by gas appliances. Common symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning include: Headaches, nausea, dizziness, breathlessness and loss of consciousness.

On average, it causes over 200 hospital admissions per year and around 40 deaths. As carbon monoxide has no colour, smell or taste, it can go by unnoticed, unless you have an alarm. Not only is it harmful to health, but it is also a highly flammable gas that could cause a dreadful explosion.



As you can expect, the law is very strict when it comes to gas safety in rental properties. Failing to comply with the regulations makes you liable for heavy fines and even imprisonment. This is why you must use a professional on the Gas Safe Register to fit all of your gas appliances, pipes and flues.

It is also your responsibility to keep all of these features maintained. A registered engineer must conduct gas safety checks every year on all gas burning appliances. If everything is okay, then you will be given a Gas Safety Certificate. If not, the necessary works must be completed before you are awarded a certificate. It is also your duty to provide tenants with a copy of the certificate before they move in and following any checks.

ELECTRICAL SAFETY

At the beginning of the tenancy, check that the electrics are safe and are kept in a safe condition throughout the tenancy, including the electrical circuits, switches, sockets and light fittings. Every so often, conduct property inspections to check there are no signs of damage, such as cracks, burn marks or frayed leads.

The best way to be sure is to have work conducted by a qualified electrician. All Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) must have their electrics inspected by a professional every five years. For ordinary rental properties, you are not legally required to do so, but it may still be a good idea to help you keep your tenants safe and your property in a good condition.

Only buy appliances with a CE marking, which shows it meets EU safety requirements. FireProtectionOnline also recommends that you have your appliances PAT tested every year by a registered electrician.

FURNISHINGS

All upholstered furnishings that you provide must be made from a fire resistant material, and you must not remove the label that confirms this when moving the furniture into the property. However, the Furniture and Furnishings Act 1988 does not apply to carpets or curtains.

FIRE-FIGHTING

HMOs must have fire extinguishers on each floor of the building in communal areas. It is also wise to provide a fire blanket and a multipurpose extinguisher for your tenants. These will give them the resources to stop a small fire from getting out of control. And although you don't expect them to fight a fire, these items could help them make a safe exit.

If you do provide an extinguisher, you must make sure your tenants know how to operate it. Although you might not be able to provide them with training, you can offer basic advice.

You will also need to think about which type of extinguisher to provide. A powder extinguisher is best for different uses, but it can cause a significant amount of damage. You should weigh up the risks and decide whether a foam or water extinguisher might be better suited. But remember, any extinguisher you provide must be serviced every year by a trained technician.

FIRE RISK ASSESSMENTS

You must conduct a fire risk assessment for your HMO under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. Although you can complete this yourself, you are advised to get a professional to conduct it on your behalf. Either way, as the responsible person, you will be held accountable for it. The aim of the assessment is to identify fire hazards, reduce the risk to those living in the property and decide precautions to ensure the safety of tenants. Using the report, you can then act to make the property as safe as possible.

FireProtectionOnline suggests having a fire risk assessment for any type of tenancy. The report will identify emergency evacuation plans and any fire doors needed. Always tell your tenants what the evacuation route is and ensure that they don't block it up.

Following this advice will ensure that you fulfil all your legal obligations regarding fire safety. Of course, if you use a managing agent to look after your property, you won't have to worry too much. However, you need to make sure that they do everything correctly, as you are ultimately responsible for protecting your tenants.

Remember, it is not just your property at risk, but the lives of your tenants too!

