



Housing Services factsheet

- fire safety in your home



Keeping safe in your home

There are many simple measures you can take to help prevent a fire in your home. Most of them cost nothing to do but following this advice can keep you and your family safe.

Give yourself time to escape

- Fit a smoke detector that is powered by your mains supply or battery.
- Preferably have a minimum of one smoke detector on each floor of your home.
- London Fire Brigade will carry out a free Home Fire Safety Visit and fit a free smoke alarm if you don't have one.
- Test your smoke alarm weekly- just press the button.
- If fire doors are fitted to your home don't remove them or wedge them open – they are designed to resist flames to allow time for you and your family to be rescued.
- Close internal doors at night to prevent fire from spreading.
- Do not damage, remove or wedge open internal doors.
- If you are a leaseholder ensure **ANY** alterations, including renewing the front entrance door has our permission. The door **MUST** meet current regulations.
- Please comply with the requirement to have gas appliances safety checked.



Remember:

IF THERE IS A FIRE IN YOUR HOME

NEVER use a lift

Do not try to fight the fire yourself

Call 999 from any phone

To help us in a fire emergency and evacuation, please tell us whenever there are changes to who is living in your home and if they have any vulnerabilities, so that we know how many people are living in each building.

How would you escape?



- Have a think about how you would escape from each room in your home if a fire broke out.
- Make sure all the people living with you know how to get out.
- Practising the escape route from time to time is a good thing to do to make sure it isn't blocked.
- If the escape route includes a window, is it locked? Where is the key to unlock it? How far is it to the ground and how will you get down there?
- If relevant, consider how children, the elderly or someone with a disability might need assistance to escape.
- It is easy to get confused if it is dark or smoky so it's important to know your route out of the building using the exit stairs. Count the number of doors you need to go through or use familiar objects to guide you to help with your escape in the event of a fire.
- Make sure you take the time to discuss your emergency plan with your family before a fire happens - don't wait until it's too late.

Flats and maisonettes

London Fire Brigade advice is:

If there is a fire or smoke inside YOUR maisonette or flat and YOUR escape route is clear:

- Get everyone out, close the door and walk as calmly as possible out of the building.
- Do not use the lift.
- Call 999, give your address including the number of your flat and state which floor the fire is on.

If there is a fire or smoke inside your maisonette or flat but your escape route is NOT clear:

- It may be safer to stay in your maisonette or flat until the fire brigade arrives.
- Close the door and use soft materials to block any gaps to stop the smoke.
- Go to a window and call for help.
- Dial 999, give your address including the number of your flat and state which floor the fire is on.

If there is a fire in ANOTHER part of the building but not inside your maisonette or flat:

- Purpose-built maisonettes or blocks of flats are built to give you some protection from fire.
- Walls, floors and doors will hold back flames and smoke for a minimum of 30 to 60 minutes.
- If you are in your flat, you are usually safer staying there unless heat or smoke is affecting you.
- Stay put and call 999.
- Tell the fire brigade where you are and the best way to reach you.
- If you are within the communal areas of the building, leave and call 999.

Evacuation advice

The following evacuation advice is from the London Fire Brigade



- If any of your smoke alarms go off, never assume it is a false alarm.
- Shout 'FIRE' to alert others in the home.
- Don't waste time investigating what's happened or rescuing valuables.
- Don't tackle fires yourself, many people are injured this way. Leave it to the professionals.
- Keep calm and get out, closing doors behind you to slow down the spread of fire and smoke.
- Before you open a door check if it's warm with the back of your hand. If it is, don't open it, there may be a fire on the other side.
- If there's smoke, keep low where the air is clearer.
- Call 999 as soon as it is safe to do so – 999 calls are free.
- Never go back into the building once you are safely outside.
- If you can't get out, find a safe room away from fire, ideally one with a window that opens and access to a phone.
- Close the door and put bedding or any soft materials around the bottom of the door to block the smoke, then open the window and shout "HELP, FIRE".
- If you have a phone with you, call 999 and ask for the fire brigade.
- Be ready to describe where you are and the quickest way to reach you.
- If you're on the ground or first floor, you may be able to escape through a window. Use soft materials to cushion your fall and lower yourself down carefully. Don't jump.

IF YOU HAVE A PHONE

- If you have a mobile phone but cannot make voice calls, you can contact the 999 emergency services by SMS text.
- You will only be able to use this service if you have registered with emergency SMS first. Text 'register' to 999.
- You will get a reply – then follow the instructions you are sent.

How safe are your appliances?

- Make sure you allow access to your home when your safety check is due.
- Have a safety check on your gas boiler every year – this is sensible as well as being a legal requirement
- Think about how old your gas and electrical appliances are and where they are positioned - if you are not sure all your appliances are safe, get expert advice.
- The Council has a legal obligation to make a gas safety check every 12 months to gas appliances in your home and failure to allow access can lead to legal action.
- If you are a leaseholder you are required to have a gas safety check each year and provide a copy of the certificate to the Council.
- More information at www.havering.gov.uk/GasSafety



Candles and cigarettes

- **NEVER** place candles on top of electrical appliances such as televisions. If you use candles ensure they are kept away from materials that might catch fire such as curtains or furniture and are kept out of reach of children and pets.
- Make sure all cigarettes and candles are completely put out before leaving a room, especially before going to bed.
- Empty ashtrays and dispose of contents carefully so you don't put smouldering items on top of paper in your waste bin.

Electrical sockets

- Check sockets regularly - if there are burn marks or they get hot get them checked by a registered electrician.
- Don't overload sockets, especially with high powered items like kettles, irons or heaters - have more sockets fitted by a registered electrician.
- Turn off and unplug all possible electrical equipment when it is not in use, including TVs, stereos, fans and, kettles, especially before going to bed.



Electrical appliances

- Hairdryers, straighteners and curling tongs get very hot - ensure they have time to cool down before you leave your home.
- Ensure irons are switched off when not in use and do not leave unattended when switched on.
- Don't leave your phone or tablet charging over night as batteries can overheat and catch fire.
- While items are cooling off, ensure they are stored away from materials which can catch fire.
- Don't use electrical heaters near curtains or furnishings and **NEVER** dry clothes on them.
- Don't cover air vents on storage or fan heaters and ensure they are kept dust free.
- Don't trail cables under carpets or rugs.
- If you have bought second hand appliances have them checked by a qualified electrician before using them.



Before you go to bed



- Close all doors as this helps to prevent fire spreading.
- Switch off and unplug electrical items such as TVs and avoid charging devices like mobile phones when you sleep.
- Only leave essential appliances switched on such as the fridge or freezer, turn all others off.
- Make sure candles are out before you go to bed.
- Check your cooker and heaters are turned off.

Mirrors and glass



- Don't have crystal or glass objects on windowsills where they focus the sun's rays and set items alight
- Don't put mirrors opposite windows as they can reflect the sun's rays onto curtains or soft furnishings and set them alight

In the kitchen

- Fit a heat alarm in the kitchen, they detect the increase in temperature caused by a fire but will not be set off by cooking fumes.
- Don't cook if you are tired, have been drinking alcohol or taking medication that might make you drowsy.
- Have any appliances fitted by an appropriately qualified professional i.e. Gas appliances by Gas Safe Engineer.
- If you buy a new Gas cooker ensure it is fitted with Flame Supervision Device – this makes sure the supply of fuel is cut off automatically and immediately if the flame goes out for any reason.
- Never leave cooking unattended - most fires start in kitchens.
- Avoid leaving children alone when cooking is going on.
- Always keep matches and saucepan handles out of reach.
- Never dry towels on or near a cooker.
- Don't let fat or grease build up i.e. on a grill pan as it can easily catch light.
- Use chip pans safely - don't fill the pan more than one third full, dry chips before putting them into the oil to avoid spitting or boiling over and NEVER put chips in the pan if the oil has started smoking.
- If a chip pan catches fire carefully use a fire blanket or a damp towel (not one dripping water) to smother the flames and if safe turn off the cooker.
- Make sure you turn the cooker off when you've finished using it.
- Never allow cables to trail across a cooker.



In the living room



- When buying or replacing furniture (i.e. sofas and chairs) make sure they contain fire retardant foam rather than polyurethane foam.
- Don't leave appliances such as televisions or computers on standby, switch them off at the mains socket.

In bedrooms

- Don't smoke or have candles in your bedroom - you may fall asleep without putting them out properly.
- Don't use or store any aerosols around any source of heat - they are highly flammable.
- If you use an electric blanket, have it tested by a registered electrician at least every three years and consider changing it if it is more than 10 years old - if it has an old BEAB safety mark (a round symbol) rather than white capital letters on a black background the blanket is over 10 years old. Ensure the blanket is switched off before you get into bed.
- If your blanket shows any signs of wear (fraying fabric, scorch marks, exposed elements, creasing or folding, soiling, damp patches, damaged or missing tie tapes, worn flex, loose connections) - do not use it.
- Never use a hot water bottle in a bed that has an electric blanket - water and electricity don't mix.



In the bathroom

- Keep portable electrical equipment (hairdryers etc) out of bathrooms - water and electricity don't mix.
- Heaters **MUST** be fitted high on a wall - **NEVER** above a bath or within reach of taps.
- **NEVER** run extension cables into the bathroom



In communal areas

- Keep communal areas clear of clutter - no net curtains, carpets or rugs as these can spread fire.
- Don't leave rubbish bags outside your door or put plants or other items outside as this can block escape routes and will be removed by Council staff.
- Make sure bikes, scooters, prams, buggies and mobility scooters are stored appropriately i.e. not in communal areas where they may be a trip hazard or cut off an escape route for you or other residents in the event of an emergency, or hinder the work of the fire service.
- Communal doors are fire check doors - ill-fitting or damaged doors may not fully protect you from the spread of smoke or fire.
- Fire doors have self-closing devices to close the doors automatically.
- **NEVER** prop open these doors as it can damage both the door and the closer - report any deliberate damage to the doors to the Contact Centre or your Caretaker.
- Landings, stairwells and corridors form part of your escape route so rubbish left in these areas may block your route or provide fuel for a fire.



Getting rid of rubbish

- Put bags of rubbish either down chutes or into the external bins provided.
- Place rubbish into small bags when using bin chutes - if a chute becomes blocked report it to your Caretaker.
- Bulky items – these can be removed by Havering Council – book your collection at www.havering.gov.uk/BulkyWaste.

Outside your building

- Do not store petroleum spirit (petrol, diesel or paraffin) or liquid propane gas cylinders in your home or the block as they can easily ignite.
- Don't park in a way that would block access to the building or cause a problem for emergency services personnel to enter.
- Don't allow people into your block if you don't know who they are.
- Do not smoke in communal areas (stairways, landings or lifts) - it is illegal.

Carbon monoxide

- Carbon monoxide (CO) is a poisonous gas that has no smell or taste and can kill quickly.
- If you have a solid fuel burner, open fire or a gas boiler get them serviced regularly and fit a CO alarm.

In the garden or on the balcony

- Remember you are not allowed to use a barbecue on your balcony or in a communal garden.
- If using a barbecue in your own garden when you have finished cooking make sure it is extinguished and any charcoal is no longer hot.
- Even the small disposable barbecues have set decking alight when the coals have not been properly extinguished.
- Keep garden furniture and dried plants etc well away from escape routes as they easily ignite and can cause fumes.



What the Council does:

As part of regular maintenance work we do daily, monthly and annual checks on tower block housing to make sure that the appropriate fire prevention and safety measures are in place. Our checks include:

- Daily checks to identify and remove any items which could block a fire escape route (including bulk rubbish).
- Monthly checks to ensure that all communal doors are in full working order and that they are fitted with a smoke seal strip to provide a barrier against fire, smoke and hot gases.
- Annual checks on all smoke detection equipment.
- Fire Risk Assessments in every building.
- Test Emergency lighting.
- Annual Gas safety checks – we will contact you to make an appointment for this to be carried out.



London Fire Brigade advice

The London Fire Brigade provides the following advice if a fire occurs in your home:

- Flats are built to give you some protection from fire.
- Walls, floors and doors will hold back flames and smoke for a while.
- Putting damp towels along the bottom of doors can help keep smoke out.
- If a fire occurs in your building, it is usually safe for you stay in your home unless it is affected by heat or smoke. (This ensures routes are clear for the Fire Brigade to access and tackle the fire).
- If your home is affected by heat or smoke, leave immediately if it is safe.
- Alert everyone in your home.
- If possible, close the door to any room where the fire is burning.
- Do not stop to collect your belongings.
- Close your front door as you leave.
- Alert your neighbors if they are at risk and it is safe to do so. Leave via the stairs - NEVER take the lift.
- Call 999 and ask for the fire brigade - tell them the address of the building, that it is a tower block, your flat number and which floor the fire is on.
- Do not re-enter the building until you are told it is safe to do so by the Emergency Services.

If you are trapped in your home:

- Close the door.
- Block any gaps around your door to block smoke.
- Shout and/or wave a blanket or cloth from the window to get help.
- Keep your mobile phone with you (if possible).
- If there is a lot of smoke, crawl along the floor where the air will be clearer.
- Stay as far away from the fire as possible and if possible, close all doors behind you to reduce spread of the fire.

