

Fire Safety Advice for Students

When you consider moving into privately rented accommodation, you are likely to look at the state of decoration, furnishing and repair of the property. The last thing on your mind is whether the accommodation is safe from fire and whether you would be safe should a fire occur. However, houses shared by students are particularly at risk of fire as they can present lethal dangers.

Common fire safety standards for all Student Homes

There are certain fire safety features that students should look out for in their accommodation. These include:

- no unsafe electrical wiring;
- a basic fire warning system;
- an escape route, free from obstructions or materials that burn easily;
- good maintenance and repair of all means of escape and fire precautions;
- locks on exit doors which can be opened easily without a key;
- fire extinguishers and fire blankets in shared kitchens; and
- fire resistant furniture and furnishings.

Smoke Alarms

Working smoke alarms are a vital protection from the dangers of fire in the home. They provide the early warning and precious time which can save lives and prevent injury.

- Occupiers without a smoke alarm (which discovered the fire) are four times more likely to die in a fire than those who own alarms.
- Test smoke alarms weekly and vacuum the casing monthly to ensure dust isn't blocking the sensors.

Smoking

Fires started by smoking materials account for more than one-third of all fire deaths.

- Never leave a lit cigarette or pipe unattended while you answer the door or telephone.
- Never smoke in bed.
- Keep your matches and lighters in a safe place, well out of reach of children.
- Extinguish all cigarettes before going to bed, and make sure all tab ends are cold before emptying ashtrays into bins.

Electrical Appliances

Plugs and flexes

- Some electrical appliances can be left on all the time. Check the manufacturers' instructions for details. All other electrical equipment should be switched off at the appliance and at the socket when not in use, or unplugged if there is no wall switch.
- Remove plugs carefully and do not pull the flex.
- Use a three-pinned plug that conforms to the British Standard and carries the kitemark.
- If possible use a separate socket for each appliance.

Fuse ratings

| Fuse size | Typical appliances |
|------------------|---|
| 3 Amp | For most appliances up to 720 watts (W): <i>radios, table lamps, soldering irons, televisions</i> |
| 5 Amp | For most appliances rated between 720 watts (W) and 1200 watts (W): <i>small microwave ovens, some DIY electric power tools, small cooking appliances, electric blankets, audio and hi-fi, slow cookers, home computers, curling tongs and rollers</i> |
| 13 Amp | For appliances rated over 1200 watts (W): <i>irons, kettles, fan heaters, electric fires, lawn mowers, toasters, deep fat fryers, refrigerators, washing machines, tumble dryers, spin dryers, vacuum cleaners, dishwashers.</i> |

- Don't leave the television on 'standby' at night. Switch it off at the wall socket or unplug it if there is no switch.
- Remember, fit an extra smoke alarm in the bedroom if you have a TV, computer or hi-fi in the room.

Cooking

- More than 50% of reported fires and 66% of unreported fires are the result of cooking.
- Chip pans and hot oil are an important factor in many serious fires.
- The main problem is leaving cooking unattended.
- If you must cook with hot oil use an appliance, which is thermostatically controlled, for example an electric deep fat fryer.

Gas Safety

Each year about 30 people die from carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning caused by gas appliances and flues that have not been properly installed or maintained. Since 1992, 10 students have died from, and thousands more made ill by, exposure to CO. CO cannot be seen, tasted or smelt but it can kill without warning in a few hours. People are most vulnerable when they are asleep.

The Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations require landlords to make sure that appliances and flues are maintained in good order and checked for safety every 12 months. An annual service inspection is not the same thing as a safety check. Landlords must keep the record of safety checks for at least two years. They should issue each tenant with a copy of a safety check record within 28 days of completion.

Advice to tenants

- Watch out for gas appliances that produce soot, or that have flames burning yellow instead of blue.
- If you experience symptoms such as headaches, chest pains, sickness or dizziness, stop using gas appliances immediately and seek medical advice.
- Do not use the appliance again until it has been checked.
- Never block air bricks or vents in rooms where there is a gas appliance. It needs air to burn efficiently.
- When moving into a new property, check that previous tenants have not blocked up the vents. Even on very cold nights, do not cover draught-proof doors and windows in rooms containing an appliance, as this may lead to the production of CO.

Outside

- One in five of all arson attacks in the UK are on residential properties.
- Fires started outside can easily penetrate doors and windows and spread internally.
- Don't let combustible rubbish accumulate outside in yards and gardens.
- Keep wheelie bins away from the house, in particular windows.

What to do if a fire starts

- Don't panic.
- If possible, close the door on the room where the fire is.
- Close all other doors to help delay the spread of fire and smoke.
- Before opening a door, touch it with the back of your hand. If it feels warm, don't open it.
- Get everyone out as quickly as possible.
- Don't try to pick up possessions.
- Telephone **999** and ask for the fire brigade.
- Never go back into the house until told it is safe to do so by a fire officer.
- If a fire cuts you off and you can't use the door because of flames or smoke, close the door and use towels or sheets to block any gaps. This helps to stop smoke spreading into the room.
- Try to make your way to a window. If the room is smoky, crawl along the floor - remember that smoke rises.
- Open the windows and try to attract attention. Other people may be able to call the fire brigade.
- If you are in immediate danger and the room is not too high from the ground, drop cushions or bedding to help break your fall.
- If you can, get out of the window feet first, and lower yourself to the full length of your arms before dropping.

If you would like West Yorkshire Fire & Rescue Service to carry out a fire safety check in your home and fit smoke alarms where necessary, free of charge, then call: **0800 587 4536**

A member of the fire and rescue service will contact you to arrange a visit convenient to you.