

## Annex R (informative) **Advice to occupiers of dwellings in residential buildings**

### **R.1 General**

This annex contains information regarding fire safety advice that can be given to occupiers of flats and other dwellings in residential buildings which are not single private dwellings. In general the same information applies to both occupiers of flats and occupiers of other domestic residential buildings. Where the information differs, the difference is highlighted in the text.

The fire and rescue service can generally provide additional advice on fire safety if it is felt to be necessary.

Examples of suitable fire instruction notices (see **44.2**) are given in Annex 5.

### **R.2 Smoke alarms**

The longer a fire burns before it is discovered, the more likely it is to cause death or injury. A fire that starts smouldering at night is therefore very dangerous.

People are not always awoken by the smell of smoke. A fire involving certain furnishings can produce poisonous gases that prevent people from recovering consciousness. Even when people do awake, their means of exit can be blocked by thick choking smoke.

Installing smoke alarms in a dwelling does not stop fires starting and does not put a fire out, but if properly installed and looked after they can give an early warning of fire and increase the chances of escape.

Guidance on the selection and installation of smoke alarms can be obtained from local fire and rescue services.

### **R.3 Ways in which fires can start**

Fires in domestic buildings can start in many ways, including:

- careless use of matches, candles, cigarettes and pipes;
- careless use of cookers, especially leaving chip pans without watching them;
- drying and airing of clothes and other items that could burn near heaters such as gas fires and electric radiant, storage and convector heaters;
- no fire guards to prevent objects from falling into an open fire;
- children playing with matches and cigarette lighters;
- old or faulty domestic appliances, including electric blankets;
- putting portable heaters close to furniture and curtains;
- not taking out the plugs from electrical appliances at night or when away from home, unless they are designed for continuous operation, e.g. refrigerators, video recorders, clocks, etc.;
- use of paraffin heaters;
- covering of storage and convector heaters thus preventing air from getting to them;
- irregular or poor servicing of heating appliances.

#### R.4 General fire safety advice

Figure R.1 shows an example of general fire safety advice that can be given to occupiers of dwellings in residential buildings.

Figure R.1 **General fire safety advice for occupiers of dwellings in residential buildings**

Small fires are common, causing serious injuries and extensive damage to property and possessions. By following a few simple steps and maintaining a basic level of awareness you can considerably reduce the chances of fire in your home. The easiest and most effective way of protecting your home is by fitting at least one smoke alarm, and regularly making sure it works.

The following 13 tips will help keep your family and home safe:

1. Fit smoke alarms on each level in your home. Keep them free from dust and test them once a week. Consider buying a 10-year alarm; otherwise change the batteries in your alarm every year.
2. Make a fire action plan so that everyone in your home knows how to escape if there is a fire.
3. Keep the exits from your home clear so that people can escape if there is a fire.
4. Make sure that everyone in your home can easily find the keys for doors and windows.
5. Take extra care in the kitchen – accidents while cooking account for over half of fires in homes. Never leave young children alone in the kitchen.
6. Take extra care when cooking with hot oil. Consider buying a deep-fat fryer which is controlled by a thermostat (if you don't already have one).
7. Never leave lit candles in rooms that nobody is in or in rooms where children are on their own. Make sure candles are in secure holders on a surface that doesn't burn and are away from any materials that could burn.
8. Make sure cigarettes are stubbed out properly and are disposed of carefully, and never smoke in bed.
9. Get into the habit of closing doors at night. If you want to keep a child's bedroom door open, close the doors to the lounge and kitchen; it may well help save their life if there is a fire.
10. Don't overload electrical sockets. Remember, one plug for one socket.
11. Keep matches and lighters where children can't see or reach them.
12. Take special care when you're tired or when you've been drinking.
13. Don't leave the TV or other electrical appliances on standby as this could cause a fire. Always switch it off and unplug when it's not in use.

If you or a member of your household has any difficulty seeing, hearing or moving about the home, you will need to take extra care to deal with the risk of a fire. Your local Fire and Rescue Service will be able to assess how safe your home is and help to fit fire safety equipment such as smoke alarms.

High-rise flats are built to be fire-resisting, and most fires won't spread further than one or two rooms. Walls, ceilings and doors will hold back flames and smoke, so if there's a fire somewhere else in the building, you're usually safest in your flat unless you're affected by heat or smoke.

You should plan how to escape if there is a fire in your home. It is likely that the flat will share common areas with other flats. The owner or occupiers of the flats will have the responsibility to make sure that the necessary fire precaution measures needed in these areas are installed. For example, there may be a fire alarm and the doors and fire resisting features of the common areas will need to be maintained. It is important that occupiers understand the fire precaution measures built into the common areas and that they ask the landlord to explain the safety plans for the premises and make sure that they are familiar with what they should do when a fire happens. If you cannot escape you will need to find a room where you can wait for assistance. This is particularly important if you have difficulty moving around or using stairs. It is advisable for your safe room to have a window that opens, and a phone.

## R.5 Heating

Most dwellings, including flats, are provided with a fixed heating system. The risk of a fire occurring can be reduced if the fixed heating system is used rather than heaters, as all types of portable heaters can start a fire if they are not properly sited, used correctly and maintained in good working order.

The entrance lobby and corridor of a flat is the normal escape route in the event of a fire, so it is essential that portable radiant heaters are not used in these areas. It is not advisable to use paraffin heaters. Special care needs to be taken with portable bottle gas heaters, particularly when changing cylinders. The manufacturer's instructions for all portable heaters include guidance on where they should be placed, how they should be used and how they can be kept in safe working order.

## R.6 Doors

Self-closing doors are provided in flats and other dwellings in residential buildings, to stop the spread of fire and smoke. It is most important that they are not wedged open and that the self-closing mechanism works correctly.

If self-closing doors do not close themselves, it is the responsibility of the occupants to ensure that the defect is reported to the porter, caretaker or landlord, or to the local housing authority.

It can help to prevent the spread of fire if occupants close tightly as many doors as possible before going to bed or when leaving the premises empty.

## R.7 Abuse of fire-fighting equipment

Fire-fighting equipment (in the form of fire extinguishers, fire mains and outlets) and fire safety signs are installed in flats and other residential buildings. It is the responsibility of all occupants to ensure that such equipment is not interfered with, and if any item of equipment is found apparently damaged, to report it immediately.

## R.8 Access roads

It is important that fire and rescue service access roads to blocks of flats and other residential buildings are kept clear and unobstructed, to allow access by the fire and rescue service and other emergency vehicles at all times. It is the responsibility of all occupants to ensure that they do not park their cars in these roads or allow their visitors to do so, and if they see any vehicles parked there, to report it.

## R.9 Sprinkler systems

Sprinkler systems are activated by heat from the fire, and release water onto it. They are designed to prevent the fire growing, so that much less smoke and heat are produced and people have more time to escape. In many cases a sprinkler system will put the fire out. Where a sprinkler system is installed it is important that the sprinklers are not painted over, since this can slow their response to a fire. Concealed sprinklers hide the sprinkler using a cover plate, which falls away when the solder holding it in place melts. It is particularly important that this cover plate is not painted over.

Figure S.1 Example of a fire instruction notice for use in flats

This building has been built in such a way as to protect the people in it if a fire breaks out. The important thing to remember is that if the fire starts in your home, it is up to you to make sure that you can get out of it.

**AT ALL TIMES**

- Make sure that the smoke alarms in your home are working.
- Do not store anything in your hall or corridor, especially anything that will burn easily.
- Use the fixed heating system fitted in your home. If this is not possible, only use a convector heater in your hall or corridor. Do not use any form of radiant heater there, especially one with either a flame (gas or paraffin) or a radiant element (electric bar fire).
- Do not store things in the cupboard(s) where your gas and electricity meters are fitted.
- Do not block access roads to the building.

**IF A FIRE BREAKS OUT IN YOUR HOME**

- If you are in the room where the fire is, leave straight away, together with anybody else, then close the door.
- Do not stay behind to try to put the fire out.
- Tell everybody else in your home about the fire and get everybody to leave. Close the front door and leave the building.
- Do not use the lift (unless it is a designated evacuation lift).
- Do not use a balcony unless it is part of the escape route from the building.
- **CALL THE FIRE BRIGADE.**

**IF YOU SEE OR HEAR OF A FIRE IN ANOTHER PART OF THE BUILDING**

- It will usually be safe for you to stay in your own home.
- You must leave your home if smoke or heat affects it. Close all doors and windows.

**CALLING THE FIRE BRIGADE**

The fire brigade should always be called to a fire, even if it only seems a small fire. This should be done straight away.

The way to call the fire brigade is by telephone as follows.

- 1) Dial 999 from a land-line or 112 from a mobile phone.
- 2) When the operator answers give the telephone number you are ringing from and ask for FIRE.
- 3) When the fire brigade reply tell them clearly the address where the fire is.
- 4) Do not end the call until the fire brigade have repeated the address to you and you are sure they have got it right. The fire brigade cannot help if they do not have the full address.

Figure S.2 **Example of a fire instruction notice for use in other residential buildings**

If a fire starts in your home, it is up to you to make sure that you can get out of it.

Do not wait until a fire happens. Read these instructions and find out the best way for you and your family to get out of your home and also out of the building if a fire started somewhere else. There may be more than one way out. If you and all the other people in the building follow these rules you will all be much safer and less likely to start a fire or be injured in one.

#### **AT ALL TIMES**

- Make sure that the smoke alarms in your home are working.
- Do not store anything in your hall or corridor, especially anything that will burn easily.
- Use the fixed heating system fitted in your home. If this is not possible, only use a convector heater in your hall or corridor. Do not use any form of radiant heater there, especially one with either a flame (gas or paraffin) or a radiant element (electric bar fire).
- Do not store things in the cupboard(s) where your gas and electricity meters are fitted.
- Do not block access roads to the building.

#### **IF A FIRE BREAKS OUT IN YOUR HOME**

- If you are in the room where the fire is, leave straight away, together with anybody else, then close the door.
- Do not stay behind to try to put the fire out.
- Tell everybody else in your home about the fire and get everybody to leave. Close the front door and leave the building.
- Do not use the lift (unless it is a designated evacuation lift).
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