

**Guidance note**

**Identifying vulnerable persons at risk from fire**

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This Guidance note and checklist will support those that work or communicate with the elderly and vulnerable persons in their homes to identify whether they are at risk from fire. It can be used by family members, carers, and representatives of Housing Providers, Care Providers, Local Authorities and utility companies.

It provides a ‘checklist person-centred fire risk assessment form’, which can be used for an initial quick and easy assessment of elderly or vulnerable residents in their own private dwellings. It will provide specific and relevant information to aid in the completion of a full person-centred fire risk assessment where one is required. It can also be used for ‘Specialised Housing’ premises (i.e. Care Homes, Sheltered Housing, Extra Care and Supported Living type premises) to inform the fire risk assessment process for the whole premises and the evacuation strategy.

# Introduction

1.1 Occupants of a building can vary greatly. In some buildings they can be a mixture of employees, visitors and members of the public and they may be old, young or infirm and could have differing levels of familiarity with the building. For those people who are living in specialised housing, or live in other types of accommodation but are considered to be vulnerable, greater support may be required or a differing evacuation strategy dependent on their individual needs.

1.2 It is essential in any building, especially those of a large or more complex nature and those that cater for vulnerable people, for the management to develop a fire safety strategy. That includes an evacuation strategy that accounts for all people in a documented assessment for the premises and individuals at risk.

# 2 Legislation & Responsibilities

2.1 The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (the Order), places a requirement on the ‘responsible person’ to manage fire safety and to carry out a fire risk assessment. Article 9 (7)(b) states that an FRA should take into account “any group of persons ….being especially at risk”. To achieve this, a person–centred risk assessment needs to be carried out for the individuals identified as particularly vulnerable.

2.2 Therefore, the onus is on the management to formalise a fire and evacuation strategy to enable effective fire safety procedures to be followed in the event of an emergency. This strategy must be “unified” throughout the building and should be inclusive of all people.

# 3 The person-centred approach

3.1 The person-centred fire risk assessment will help identify residents who are at higher risk from fire in their own accommodation – whether this is due to their behaviours or their ability to respond and escape from a fire. The risk assessment should include an action plan that specifies what steps will be taken to improve the safety of the vulnerable resident.

3.2 This approach is particularly appropriate for residents in ‘Specialised Housing’ where the number of residents in each property/scheme is usually limited and the person-centred fire risk assessment can easily be carried out for every resident. It can also be applied to ‘general needs’ and other types of accommodation when vulnerable persons are identified.

3.3 A person-centred fire risk assessment should consider whether behaviours of the resident indicate signs of increased fire risk (i.e. unsafe smoking/cooking etc). It should also consider whether the resident has the ability or the mental capacity to respond appropriately to signs of fire, detection and warning signals, and the ability of the resident to evacuate the premises in the event of fire.

3.4 The appropriate person to carry out the person-centred fire risk assessment for a resident will depend on the circumstances of the scheme and the resident. It may be carried out by specialised housing scheme managers, care providers or any other party who regularly engages with the resident.

3.5 A person-centred approach should consider a ‘safety from fire’ approach, such as use of fire-safe ashtrays or smoking aprons by those who smoke. The method should also consider how a fire might develop and spread causing possible harm to the occupier. Items such as fire-retardant bedding or personal water mist systems can assist in the protection of a resident at risk and should be considered in appropriate cases.

3.6 The detection and warning system for the premises needs to be appropriate for the building and any person at risk. Therefore, fire alarm systems to British Standard 5839 parts 1 and 6 and social alarm systems that are connected to alarm receiving centres should be a requirement. The National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) Specialised Housing Guide can be utilised to ensure that the correct approach is taken.

3.7 In the event that a number of vulnerable people are found to be residents within the same building then it may be more suitable to install a full building automatic fire suppression system (sprinkler or water mist). The design and installation of any system to comply with the appropriate British Standards or an equivalent recognised standard.

3.8 The fire evacuation strategy and any associated systems put in place to support it must be communicated and explained to residents and staff. In order to monitor the effectiveness of an agreed fire and evacuation strategy, periodic evaluation should be undertaken. Any deficiencies highlighted can then be investigated and rectified where necessary. Such evaluation will enable the strategy to be kept up-to-date and reflect the changing design and occupancy of the building.

**4** **Steps in a person-centred fire risk assessment**

4.1 There are considered to be 9 steps in a person–centred fire risk assessment. These are noted below and full explanations of these are available in the NFCC Specialised Housing Guidance document.

Step 1:The characteristics, behaviours and capabilities of the resident that may lead to fire

risk.

Step 2: Determine the potential causes of fire and the existing measures to prevent fire.

Step 3: Identify any circumstances that could lead to the rapid development of fire.

Step 4: Identify existing measures to protect the resident if fire occurs.

Step 5: Consider capacity of resident to respond appropriately to fire alarm signals or signs of fire.

Step 6: Consider ability of resident to make their way to safety.

Step 7: Determine the level of risk to the resident from fire.

Step 8: Prepare action plan.

Step 9: Determine period for review of the assessment.

4.2 An initial checklist that can be carried out by a relative, care manager, scheme manager or other designated person is attached as appendix 1 to this guidance note. If risks are identified this should be passed to a manager or person who has responsibility for the safety of the residents (such as the care provider or housing provider) for further action.

4.3 Where such a person is not identifiable or does not exist then the checklist should be passed to the Local Authority Social Care Department. They will make arrangements for a more detailed assessment and referrals involving key stakeholders such as the Local Authority, Fire Service, Housing and Care Providers.

**5 TSA On-line training package – ‘Fire safety in the home’**

5.1 The link below takes you to the TSA on-line training package that has been developed with the London Fire Brigade. The first module focusses on ‘Fire safety in the home’ and is available as a resource to anyone who comes into contact with vulnerable people.

[www.tsa-voice.org.uk/e-learning](http://www.tsa-voice.org.uk/e-learning)

**6 Bibliography**

Detailed guidance on the various standards referred to in this guidance note may be obtained from the following bibliography. You can also obtain fire safety advice on other subjects by visiting the LFEPA’s website at [www.london-fire.gov.uk](http://www.london-fire.gov.uk).

The publications can be obtained from the following addresses:

|  |  |
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| **AVAILABLE FROM** | **TITLE** |
| The Stationery Office (Mail, Telephone, Fax & Internet Orders)  TSO Orders/Post Cash Dept  PO Box 29  Norwich NR3 1GN  Telephone: 0870 600 5522  Fax orders: 0870 600 5533  Web: [www.tso.co.uk](http://www.tso.co.uk) | Fire Safety – Risk Assessment: Sleeping Accommodation  ISBN: 978 1 85112 8174  Fire Safety – Risk Assessment: Residential Care Premises  ISBN:978 1 85112 818 1  Fire Safety – Risk Assessment: Healthcare Premises  ISBN: 978 1 85112 824 2  Fire Safety - Risk Assessment: Means of Escape for Disabled People Supplementary Guide  ISBN: 978 1 85112 873 7 |
| The National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC)  99 Vauxhall Road  Birmingham  B7 4HW  0121 380 6067  [adminsupport@nationalfirechiefs.org.uk](mailto:adminsupport@nationalfirechiefs.org.uk) | Fire safety in specialised housing  Free Download <https://www.nationalfirechiefs.org.uk/Higher-Risk-Accommodation>  Hard copies to order <https://cfoaservices.co.uk/specialised-housing-guidance-publication.html> |
| The “Fire Safety” guides listed above may also be downloaded free of charge from the ‘*Fire safety law’ and guidance documents for business*’ section of the CLG website at:  [**www.gov.uk/workplace-fire-safety-your-responsibilities**](http://www.gov.uk/workplace-fire-safety-your-responsibilities) | |

The above publications are current at the time of preparation of this Guidance Note (see date in footer)

1. - Person-centred fire risk assessment checklist

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Name of resident |  | | |
| Full address |  | | |
|  | | |
| Date | **DD / MM / YYYY** | Form completed by |  |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **1. Does the individual have an increased fire risk?** | | | | | |
| **Yes** |  | If yes, tick all the fire risk factors they exhibit |  | Smoking – with signs of unsafe use of smoking or vaping materials (e.g. smoking in bed). | |
|  | Use of emollient creams that are petroleum or paraffin based. | |
| **No** |  | Skip to next question |  | Air pressure mattress or oxygen cylinders are used. | |
|  | Unsafe use of portable heaters (e.g. placed too close to materials that could catch fire). | |
|  |  |  |  | Unsafe cooking practices (e.g. cooking left unattended). | |
|  |  |  |  | Overloaded electrical sockets/adaptors or extension leads. | |
|  |  |  |  | Faulty or damaged wiring. | |
|  |  |  |  | Electric blankets used. | |
|  |  |  |  | Previous fires or near misses, burns or scorch marks on carpets and furniture. | |
|  |  |  |  | Unsafe candle/tea light use (e.g. left too close to curtains or other items that could catch fire or within easy reach of children or pets). | |
|  |  |  |  | Other (please specify): |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **2. Would the individual be less able to react to an alarm or fire?** | | | | | |
| **Yes** |  | If yes, tick all the fire risk factors they exhibit |  | Mental health issues (e.g. dementia, anxiety or depression). | |
|  | Cognitive or decision making difficulties. | |
| **No** |  | Skip to next question |  | Alcohol dependency or misuse of drugs. | |
|  | Sensory impairments (e.g. hard of hearing or sight loss). | |
|  |  |  |  | Other (please specify): |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **3. Does the individual have a reduced ability to escape?** | | | | | |
| **Yes** |  | If yes, tick all the fire risk factors they exhibit |  | Have restricted mobility, are frail or have a history of falls. | |
|  | Are blind or have impaired vision. | |
| **No** |  | Skip to next question |  | Lacks capacity to understand what to do in the event of a fire. | |
|  | Is a hoarder, or there are cluttered or blocked escape routes. | |
|  |  |  |  | Are bed or chairbound. | |
|  |  |  |  | Internal doors are left open at night. | |
|  |  |  |  | Would be unable to unlock front door to escape. | |
|  |  |  |  | Other (please specify): |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **4. Are there any smoke or heat alarms fitted within the individual’s home?** | | | | | |
|  | | | | | |
| **Yes** |  | If yes, please specify which rooms have them fitted: | | | |
| **No** |  |

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|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **5. Has a carbon monoxide alarm been fitted anywhere that gas or solid fuels are used?** | | |
|  | | |
| **Yes** |  | If yes, please specify which rooms have them fitted: |
| **No** |  |

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| --- |
| **What to do next** |
| **If there are any questions in sections 1 – 3 that have been answered ‘Yes’, or you have identified that there are no smoke or heat alarms fitted, or they are broken or poorly sited, this suggests there is a risk from fire. Immediate actions are required to ensure agreed safety measures are in place:** |

* + If you are employed by a company or organisation, return this checklist to your manager for a full Person-Centred Risk Assessment to be conducted where necessary.
  + Inform the resident or other family members of the risks identified, if you are certain they will understand.
  + Contact the local fire service to arrange for a home fire safety visit.
  + If a care plan exists, all actions taken should be noted in that plan.

**In addition, you or your manager may also consider:**

* + Referral to Adult Social Care teams where a serious risk has been identified.
  + Informing the housing provider that there is an increased risk of fire to the individual.

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| **Fire safety in the home** |
| **Home fire safety visits are provided by most fire services and are usually free. Trained persons will visit the property, carry out an inspection and offer fire safety advice. Where necessary they can also install free smoke alarms.**  **A ‘Fire Safety in the Home’ booklet is available from London Fire Brigade and can be downloaded from our website. Some basic fire safety advice has also been provided below.** |

**Prevention**

* It is safer not to smoke; but anyone who does should try to smoke outside and always make sure cigarettes are put out properly.
* Never smoke in bed, or anywhere else, if there’s a chance of falling asleep.
* Use fire-safe ashtrays and fire-retardant bedding, nightwear and throws.
* Ensure paraffin based emollient creams are replaced with non-flammable alternatives.
* Candles, tea lights and incense burners should only be placed in stable, heat-resistant holders. Keep these items or any other type of naked flame well away from curtains, furniture and clothes.
* Sit at least one metre away from heaters and keep them well away from anything that can catch alight.
* Don’t overload electrical sockets.
* Close all doors at night as this helps to prevent fire and smoke spreading.
* Switch off and unplug electrical items such as TVs and avoid charging devices like mobile phones whilst asleep.

**Early warning and detection of a fire is essential**

* As a minimum, fit at least one smoke alarm on every level of the home and in any room where a fire could start. The ideal position for these are usually in rooms that are used the most and in hallways and anywhere electrical equipment is left switched on.
* Fitting multiple linked smoke alarms, that all activate together, is the best way to be alerted in the event of a fire. For some, the provision of a Telecare monitoring system may also be beneficial.
* Specialist alarms can be fitted for people who may have a delayed response to escape – for example; strobe light and vibrating pad alarms for the deaf or hard of hearing.
* Remember to test all alarms monthly.

**Escape**

* Make sure escape routes are kept clear of anything that may slow down or block exit routes.
* Ensure security gates can be easily opened from the inside without the need for a key. Keep door and window keys where everyone can find them.
* Mobility aids and any methods of calling for help should always be kept close to hand (e.g. mobile phone, link alarms/pendant).