

Houses in Multiple Occupation

Housing Act 2004

Notes on Standards of Fire Resistance

(GN.H70)

The following guidance notes will assist landlords, owners, agents etc. in complying with their legal requirements with regards to fire safety within Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs). Current legislation means a risk based approach must be taken to minimise the potential for a fire to occur or spread, and these notes provide guidance on the ideal standards which should be met to ensure the risks are sufficiently controlled.

Some form of fire protection and alarm system is required in every licensable HMO, but the extent of the protective measures will depend on the layout, size and height of the building. The Local Authority will require the fire safety measures within all their licensed HMOs to be as close as possible to the ideal standard.

This document details the requirements for means of escape and other fire precaution purposes within HMOs and is based on the use of materials and type of construction deemed to be capable of resisting the action of fire, or detecting the presence of fire. They do not necessarily comply with the Building Regulations 2000, which may impose a different or higher standard where they are applicable.

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1. Doors:

- 1.1 Doors must comply with British Standard 476 and BS8214 rated as half hour fire resisting. Existing panelled doors and doors previously 'made up' with fire resisting material are not acceptable. They will not provide adequate fire resistance and must be replaced with proprietary fire doors to current BS, as above.
- 1.2 All fire doors must be fitted with an intumescent strip incorporating a smoke seal in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions (i.e. - Dufalysite or similar approved strip). In addition they must be a close fit within the door frame.
- 1.3 All fire doors must be made effectively self-closing by means of an approved self-closing device, these being either a double chain concealed jamb closer e.g. Perkomatic or an overhead type closing device, which ensures the door closes fully within the door frame and is held firmly shut against the door stops. (Gibraltar type closers and single Perko's are not acceptable). The door should be retained in this closed position by locks or by lever latch type door furniture, all of which must be operable from inside the dwelling without the use of a key (bales catches or roller catches are not acceptable). See Appendix 1 for illustrations.
- 1.4 Any glazing in doors to be secured by 15 x 15mm finished hardwood beading bedded in intumescent putty securely fixed to the framing by screws at not less than 200mm centres. Not less than 2 No screws to any one bead.
- 1.5 Hinges (or part of the hinge) must be capable of resisting a fire and have a melting point of not less than 800°C. Doors to be hung on 1½ pair of 100mm broad leaf butt hinges fixed with 32mm No.8 steel screws. Brass hinges are **not** acceptable.
- 1.6 The door stop must be securely fixed to the door frame with steel screws.
- 1.7 Where possible i.e. in new buildings or where a new door opening is created it is recommended that manufacturer's complete frame and door 'sets' are installed.

2. Lobbies:

- 2.1 Lobbies may be necessary within the property to provide two protective fire doors to separate living accommodation from the fire escape route (where the escape route is a single staircase affording a downwards escape only).
- 2.2 Partitions to form lobbies should be constructed from 75mm x 50mm timber studding soundly fixed to the permanent fabric of the building, faced on both sides with 12mm plasterboard securely fixed by felt nails to the timber. All plates and noggins to be supplied as necessary to provide support to the edges of the covering material. Timber skirting boards to be fitted to the base of the partition walls.
- 2.3 The lobby enclosure must be carried to the full height of the room or should have a ceiling at an appropriate height, which is constructed in the same manner as the

partition walls. In addition the floor of the lobby must be capable of resisting a fire for not less than one half hour.

- 2.4 Doors situated within the lobby must comply with British Standard 476 and 8214 (see 1 to 7 above).
- 2.5 Lobbies must be effectively illuminated by artificial lighting in accordance with British Standard 5266 Part 1.

3. Screens and Partitions:

- 3.1 Screens and partitions may be constructed of:

Timber studded not less than 75mm x 50mm (3" x 2") faced on both sides with 12mm (½") plasterboard or Masterboard, Tacboard, Tacfire or Supalux building boards of the thickness recommended by the manufacturer with joints closely butted and kept to a minimum. Any joints or gaps must be properly filled and sealed.

- 3.2 Non-combustible materials must be in accordance with the Building Regulations 2000 as amended.
- 3.3 Screens and partitions may be sectionalised for the purposes of moving furniture in or out of the house, providing the sections remain to a standard of fire resistance of not less than one half hour when replaced.

4. Partitions and Spandrels:

- 4.1 Where the framing of the existing partition or spandrel does not equal or exceed 38mm in thickness then it should be taken down and a stud partition as described under item 3.1 constructed.
- 4.2 Where the framing exceeds 38mm in thickness then the panels can be made flush with the framing with 12mm (½") plasterboard or Superlux, Masterboard, Tacboard or Tacfire buildingboards on the side remote from the staircase enclosure and the whole partition completely sheeted on that side with that material.
- 4.3 Matchboard partitions should be removed and a stud partition as described erected in its place.

5. Glazing:

- 5.1 Any glazing which is necessary in doors, screens or partitions, e.g. borrowed lights, shall be 6mm (¼") fire resisting reinforced glass secured by wood or metal (not aluminium) beads, bedded in intumescent putty. Glazing beads to be of hardwood

15mm x 15mm minimum finished size. Beads to be fixed by screws at not less than 200mm centres with a minimum of two fixings per bead.

- 5.2 The casement/sash shall be fixed shut and timber frames shall have a minimum width and thickness of 44mm (1 ½") clear of rebates; each panel to be not more than 0.372m² (4 sq ft) in area.

6. Automatic Fire Sensors:

- 6.1 The spacing, area coverage and siting of fire detectors must be in accordance with British Standard 5839 Part 6 (The Design, Installation, Commissioning and Maintenance of Fire Detection and Fire Alarm Systems). Sensors/detectors should be sited throughout the escape route, within circulation spaces, high risk rooms, and in storage areas to achieve an audible warning of at least 75dB(A) within any room containing a bed. The dB(A) reading to be taken from the bed head and achieved with all doors being in the closed position. The grade and category of system required will depend on the size, layout and height of the building.

Wireless and sprinkler systems can be considered providing the system complies with the above current British Standard.

- 6.2 Consideration may be given to a visual warning device provided for any person suffering from a hearing impediment. Where necessary, the installation to incorporate manually operated call points (break glass) sited adjacent to each exit from the building. Additional call points may be requested within the escape route.
- 6.3 Self-contained (battery operated) fire sensors are not permissible within houses in multiple occupation. However, in certain circumstances, single point mains operated detectors, with battery back-up, may be specified.
- 6.4 Fire instructions should be displayed adjacent to each fire alarm call point. The action to be taken is set out below:

If you discover a fire, operate the fire alarm immediately.

Call the fire brigade from the nearest telephone.

Dial '999'.

Give the operator the telephone number and ask for 'Fire'.

When the fire brigade answers give the message distinctly/clearly.

Do not replace the receiver until your address has been repeated by the fire brigade.

Attack the fire if possible but do not take personal risks.

Leave the building.

7. Emergency Lighting:

7.1 Emergency lighting by means of electricity may be provided for the purposes of illuminating all stairways, routes of exit and any directional signs sufficiently to enable people to vacate the premises safely. The installation must be in accordance with the recommendations of BS 5266 Part 1. The requirement may be waived by the Environmental Health Officer of the Council if they are satisfied adequate means of illumination are available from alternative sources.

8. Fire Fighting Equipment:

8.1 It is strongly recommended that fire-fighting equipment is provided within the building in accordance with the requirements of BS 5423 – BS EN3 to enable the occupiers to extinguish any fire in the early stages of combustion.

9. General:

9.1 The soffit of a protected staircase and the underside of the exit-way to the street (where basement or cellar under) is to be of sound lath and plaster or plasterboard or one of the following fire resistant sheet materials to the manufacturers recommended thickness:- Superlux, Masterboard, Tacboard or Tacfire.

9.2 No additional gas meters are to be installed in the staircase enclosure.

9.3 It is recommended that flame retardant paints be used in the escape route(s). The paint to comply with BS476 Part 6 and Part 7 and current building regulations – Approved Document B (Fire) and be Class 0 (to limit the spread of flame).

9.4 Asbestos based materials are not acceptable.

9.5 Locks on entrance doors to accommodation should be of a type that can be opened from the inside without the use of a key.

9.6 Letter openings in entrance doors to accommodation are unacceptable unless, where installed, then an opening, not greater than 250mm x 38mm should be cut out at approximately 900mm above the bottom of the door. This opening should not exceed the internal dimensions of the frame of the letter flap.

9.7 Smoke seals should be fitted to any hinged flap unless a totally enclosed collecting box, which is of fire resisting constructions, is provided over the slot on the inner face of the door.

- 9.8 No electrical, gas or liquid fuelled appliances should be placed within any protected escape route without the written approval of the Environmental Health Officer.
- 9.9 No alterations to escape routes, staircases, landings and lobbies may be carried out and no partitions erected or demolished without prior approval of the Environmental Health Officer.
- 9.10 Keep means of escape clear of furniture, accumulations of rubbish, and any other obstruction.
- 9.11 Following completion of works to ensure satisfactory means of escape in case of fire from premises in multiple occupation, an ongoing programme of maintenance must be undertaken by the person or persons having control of the premises.

The importance of maintaining these works once they have been provided cannot be over emphasised.

If you have any queries relating to these fire resistance notes please contact:

Housing Standards and Enforcement Team on 020-8726 6100
Or the HMO Team - hmo@croydon.gov.uk – Phone: 0208 604 7474