

FIRE SAFETY ADVICE FOR RESIDENTIAL CARE PROVIDERS DURING THE COVID-19 PERIOD



Advice 1: circulated 16/04/20

As the UK follows Government guidance to respond to the Coronavirus Pandemic, it is possible that building owners, managers and staff are making changes to how premises are used, staffed and managed which could, if not fully balanced and considered, adversely impact on fire safety.

The following information, whilst not fully comprehensive, is intended to provide initial support and guidance to ensure residents, staff and premises remain safe throughout this challenging and rapidly evolving period.

Whilst control measures to protect against Covid-19 are crucial, fire safety should also remain a priority. With careful consideration it is possible to balance both hazards. Detailed guidance documents for different building uses are available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/fire-safety-law-and-guidance-documents-for-business>

EVACUATION PLAN

All staff, residents and visitors must be familiar with the evacuation plan, this includes all temporary and bank staff. Staffing levels in care homes must be maintained to ensure emergency plans can be effectively managed and staff should constantly monitor the situation on their premises. At no point should your staffing level drop below the minimum needed to safely deliver the evacuation plans you have put in place.

If staffing levels are affected by Covid-19, care homes should review their risk assessment and emergency plan. If you feel your minimum staffing arrangements to manage an evacuation can't be achieved, you should contact the Protection Team on 01743 260200 or email businessfiresafety@shropshirefire.gov.uk for further advice and guidance.

If a fire does occur in your premises you must ensure the fire service is called at the earliest opportunity and inform the operator that an evacuation is in progress.

To prevent any unnecessary disruption, please ensure that any known problems causing false fire alarms are immediately corrected, so that there is a high degree of confidence that fire alarms that do occur are genuine.

FIRE RISK ASSESSMENTS

It is important that, as changes are naturally made to control the spread of Covid-19, they are also considered in the context of your premises fire risk assessment to help manage and mitigate the risk of fire as much as possible. Significant changes should be identified and recorded. Consider asking some simple questions:

- **Risk Reduction:** Have you taken all reasonable measures to reduce the risk of fire? e.g. isolating all non-essential equipment and machinery
- **Fire alarm systems:** Is your fire alarm system in a good working order? – ensure it remains tested regularly to ensure this.
- **Interim measures:** If you have had to implement some interim measures do all your staff know and understand why and what they are?
- **New or emerging risk:** Has risk changed? Have things been put in place as a response to the situation that have increased fire risk? (e.g. Introduction of oxygen use / storage)

FIRE ALARM SYSTEMS

It is important that fire alarm, emergency lighting and other fire safety systems are maintained in good working condition at all times through the continuation of your normal testing regimes.

If your system/s are due maintenance by a qualified engineer, but you want to limit the number of visitors to your premises at this time, you may decide to delay the attendance of the engineer. If you take this action you must record it as a significant finding in the fire risk assessment and highlight the importance of the regular tests you then undertake to ensure the system/s remain fully functional

There may still be occasions when engineers / contractors have to attend your premises to maintain essential fire safety systems. You should plan ahead for this eventuality within your Business Continuity arrangements.

If you are uncertain whether maintenance schedules can safely be extended for the system/s in your premises you should contact a qualified fire safety system engineer.

FIRE DOORS

Buildings are fitted with self-closing fire doors to prevent smoke and fire from spreading from one compartment to another and to protect escape routes.

Emerging intelligence suggests some building users are wedging open self-closing fire doors as a Covid-19 control measure (intended to reduce the need to touch locks and door handles etc). Whilst this is understandable in the context of the coronavirus outbreak, it is essential that this hazard is balanced against the risk of uncontrolled spread of fire and smoke when a fire occurs.

Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service strongly advises against the practice of wedging fire doors and asks responsible persons to consider other control measures.

GET IN TOUCH

Due to the ongoing coronavirus outbreak Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service has implemented its business continuity planning arrangements and many staff are now working remotely, however will be picking up emails. If you wish to raise a concern or raise a question with our Fire Safety Protection team you can email businessfiresafety@shropshirefire.gov.uk