

Leaseholder fire safety guide

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Fire safety responsibilities

The [Regulatory Reform \(Fire Safety\) Order 2005](#) is a piece of statutory legislation that sets out how fire risks should be managed. The Order specifies that a “*responsible person*” for each premises must conduct a Fire Risk Assessment (FRA) and decide how any risks should be addressed.

In council-owned blocks of flats in Lambeth, the council will carry out FRAs for the communal areas of the building, and address any issues highlighted. We may ask you to cooperate with us in any safety measures we take as a result of FRAs.

As a leaseholder, you also have some responsibilities for fire safety:

- the Housing Act 2004 applies to individual flats within a block as well as the common parts, and specifies that homes should be free from avoidable hazards
- the Building Regulations, part B, specify fire safety standards for building work. If you carry out alteration or building work within your home, you should make sure that it meets the appropriate Building Regulations
- your lease states that you must not do anything that increases the fire risk to your flat or building, and states that you must comply with any reasonable regulations we make

If you are sub-letting your property to tenants, there are some additional responsibilities connected to fire safety:

- the [Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarm Regulations \(England\) 2015](#) specify that landlords should have at least one smoke alarm on every storey of their rental property which is used as living accommodation
- the [Gas Safety \(Installation and Use\) Regulations 1998](#) require that yearly safety checks are carried out on all gas appliances and flues by a Gas Safe registered engineer
- the [Electrical Equipment \(Safety\) Regulations 1994](#) places an obligation on landlords to ensure that electrical appliances and systems supplied by them are safe

Maintaining escape routes and communal areas

In the role of the "*responsible person*", Lambeth Council will ensure that escape routes such as landings and staircases are unobstructed, free of hazards, and do not contain materials that could encourage the spread of fire. As part of this process we expect residents, including leaseholders, to comply with rules on use of the communal areas and storage.

Storage of gases

- residents must not store contained gases, with the exception of medical gases such as oxygen cylinders, anywhere within their building
- if you need to use medical gases, you must inform your Area Housing Office so that this can be recorded

Use and storage of other materials

You must not store items in the communal areas of the block. Combustible items will be removed by us without notice, including:

- chemicals, including paints, varnishes, brush cleaner, turpentine, petrol, oil, diesel, fertilisers, weed killer or cleaning fluids
- barbecues or barbecue fuel. Barbecues also cannot be used on private balconies
- candles or incense sticks
- upholstered furniture or fabrics
- plastics, such as plastic garden furniture or children's toys
- household waste and recycling. Please use the designated areas for waste disposal
- mopeds, scooters or other fuelled vehicles, including within flats
- DIY materials such as timber or adhesives
- bicycles
- clothing
- washing lines

Mobility scooters should not be stored or charged in communal areas.

We have the right to request the immediate removal of other any item and will ask that non-combustible items are removed within 24 hours, or we will remove them. If you are concerned that these rules are being breached in your block, please let us know as soon as possible.

General fire safety advice

The main causes of fire in the home are smoking, cooking, faulty electrics, and the use of candles.

You can help reduce fire risk by following some simple guidelines:

- make sure you have a working smoke alarm in your home
- keep the communal areas of the building clear
- don't overload electrical sockets
- take care when cooking with hot oil
- make sure cigarettes are stubbed out and disposed of safely, and do not smoke in bed
- don't leave electrical appliances on standby
- make sure that candles have a heatproof holder and do not leave them unattended

The London Fire Brigade has produced a booklet giving comprehensive guidance on fire safety in the home:

http://www.london-fire.gov.uk/Documents/FSITH_web.pdf

Home fire safety visits

The London Fire Brigade offers a free home visit to offer advice on how to make your home safe and, where appropriate, fit a smoke alarm for free. Priority is given to people and places where there is known to be a higher risk of fire. This includes older people, especially people living alone or whose mobility, vision and hearing are impaired, mental-health services users and residents who may be affected by alcohol or drug misuse.

If you would like a visit or know someone who you think needs help, contact the London Fire Brigade:

Telephone: 020 8555 1200

Email: info@london-fire.gov.uk

Visit: www.london-fire.gov.uk/HomeFireSafetyVisit.asp

Fire safety FAQs

Lambeth's latest fire safety FAQs are available online at:

<https://www.lambeth.gov.uk/fire-safety-in-lambeth-faqs>

Fire doors

Under the terms of your lease, you are responsible for maintaining the front door of your property.

The front doors of purpose built flats play an important role in the fire safety of the building. They can prevent fire inside a flat spreading to the communal parts and to escape routes, and can stop a fire in the communal areas spreading into a flat.

The current Building Regulations, Approved Document B, specify that these doors should be fire doors offering a minimum of 30 minutes' fire resistance. If you own a purpose built flat, you should make sure that your front door is a suitably rated and properly fitted fire door. If your door was already fitted to the property when you bought it from the council or from another leaseholder, it may not meet modern standards and you may have to upgrade it.

If during a Fire Risk Assessment of the communal areas we identify that your flat might be fitted with an unsuitable door, we can ask you to replace it.

How to identify a fire door

There are several ways of checking that your flat front door is a suitable fire door:

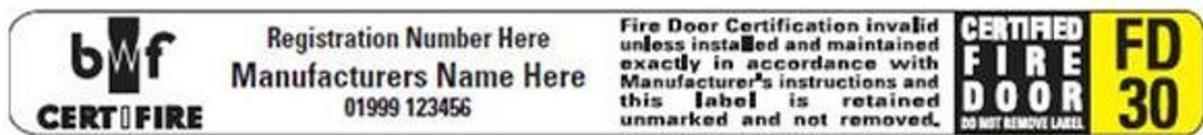
- if the door was replaced as part of work you have carried out, the door supplier should be able to provide you with a certificate
- if the door was already present when you bought the property, the solicitor who handled the sale for you should be able to provide documentation and copies of building control consent for any previous work

If no documentation is available, you may still be able to check for signs that the flat front door is not a fire door:

- fire doors are of solid timber construction, so doors that sound hollow when tapped or that appear to have hollow construction are not fire doors
- UPVC doors are not acceptable as fire doors
- fire doors must be at least 44mm thick. If a door has panelled sections of less than this thickness, it is unlikely to be a fire door
- fire doors should have three hinges bearing the CE mark
- modern fire doors may be labelled to confirm they have been fitted under one of the two industry certification schemes, BM TRADA Q-Mark or British Woodworking Federation (BWF) Certifire. Older fire doors may be fitted with a coloured plug

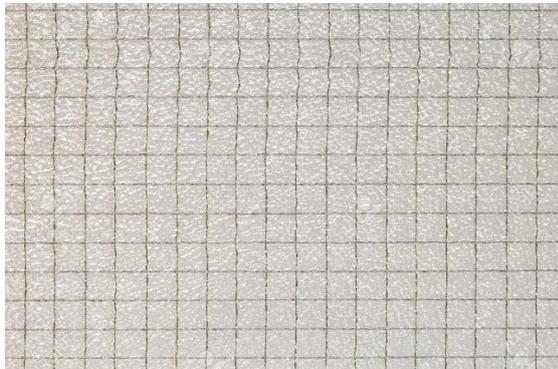


Labels for BM Trada Q-Mark scheme



BWF Certifire label for 30 minute fire door

- any glazed panels in the door should either be fitted with fire resistant glazing, etched with the relevant British Standard BS476:22, or with Georgian wired glass. Doors glazed with other kinds of glass are unlikely to be fire doors



Georgian wired glass

- fire doors should have an intumescent smoke seal fitted around the door, or should have a 25mm door stop fitted around the frame
- fire doors will have a self closing mechanism. This will be either an overhead closer or a jamb closer which meets the British Standard BS EN 1154:1997. Note that chain-type door jamb closers may not meet this standard
- openings such as cat flaps are not permitted in fire doors, and any letterboxes should be fire resisting and have an intumescent seal

Fitting a new front door

You should get the council's permission before fitting a new front door to your flat. If you do fit a new door, it should meet essential fire safety standards:

- the door must be of FD30 type, offering at least 30 minutes' fire resistance and have been tested in accordance with BS476: Part 22 1987 (the British Standard) or BS EN 1634-1 2000 (the UK adoption of European standards)
- the door supplier should give you a certificate confirming that the door meets this specification, including any ironmongery or letterbox supplied with the door set
- alternatively the door should be certificated by the BM TRADA Q-Mark scheme or BWF Certifire scheme
- the door should meet the Secured by Design standard

Please ensure that you use an accredited door installer. Installer certification schemes include BM Trada and the Warrington Certification FIRAS scheme.

Any alterations made to a fire door may affect its fire resistance. Do not cut openings such as cat flaps or letterboxes in existing fire rated doors.

Upgrading an existing door

In some circumstances it may be possible to upgrade an existing door to meet modern fire resistance standards, for example by fitting a self closing mechanism. This will only be possible if the door is of solid construction and the required thickness, and has the correct glazing.

You should contact an accredited fire door installer to confirm that your door can be upgraded to modern standards.

Security grilles

Do not fit a security grille to the outside of your front door. A grille might make it difficult for you to get out of the flat during an emergency.

If during a Fire Risk Assessment of the communal areas we find a security grille fitted to the front door of your flat, we may require you to remove it, or we may carry out the work ourselves and recharge the costs to you.

Fire doors within flats

Guidance on the fitting of fire doors within flats is given in the Building Regulations. If you are replacing doors within your flat or carrying out installation of new doors, you must seek Building Control advice.

<https://www.lambeth.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control>

Smoke alarms

Smoke alarms are a cheap and effective way of helping to protect your home. We strongly recommend that leaseholders fit smoke alarms in their homes.

Note that if you are sub-letting your property, the law says that you must fit smoke alarms.

Types of smoke alarm

Make sure that any smoke alarms you buy conform to the relevant British and European standards.

There are three main types of alarm:

Ionisation smoke alarms detect small smoke particles and are most sensitive to flaming, fast burning fires.

Optical smoke alarms are more expensive, but detect larger smoke particles including those produced by smouldering fires. This makes them particularly suitable for rooms with soft furnishings such as bedrooms and living rooms. They can also be used in hallways near kitchens.

Heat alarms detect heat rather than smoke and are therefore particularly suitable for use in kitchens.

It is also possible to buy combined alarms, e.g. combined optical smoke and heat alarms.

Battery operated and mains wired alarms are available. Battery alarms may have replaceable batteries or be sealed units with a ten-year lifespan. If you choose a mains wired alarm, you should have it installed by a competent electrician.

Regulations for landlords

If you are sub-letting your home, the [Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarm \(England\) Regulations 2015](#) stipulate that you must fit at least one smoke alarm on each storey. You must make sure the alarms are in working order at the start of each new tenancy. During a tenancy, your tenants are required to regularly check that the alarms are working and notify you of any problems.

You must also fit a carbon monoxide alarm in any room containing a solid fuel device.

The regulations do not specify whether a battery operated or mains alarm should be used. Government advice is that landlords should "*make an informed decision and choose the best alarms for their properties and tenants*".

There is a penalty of up to £5000 for non-compliance with the regulations.

Fitting smoke alarms

The Government's advice is that if only a single alarm is fitted, it should ideally be fixed to the ceiling in a "circulation space" such as a hallway or landing. In a single storey property, this should be between the living and sleeping areas. In a two storey property, one alarm should be fixed in the hallway close to the bottom of the stairs, with a second alarm on the upstairs landing.

For extra protection, you can fit alarms in all other rooms except for the bathroom. Radio interlinked sets of alarms are available so that if one detects smoke, they will all sound an alarm.

Smoke alarms should be fitted to the ceiling of the room or hallway that they are protecting. Fit them as close to the centre of the room as possible and at least 30cm away from a wall or light fitting. Follow the manufacturer's instructions when fitting the alarm.

Maintaining smoke alarms

- all smoke alarms should be tested regularly to check they are working properly. It is a good idea to test alarms monthly
- if you have been away from your home for a long period, test the alarms when you return
- battery operated alarms should have the batteries replaced every year, or when the low battery warning signal sounds
- sealed ten-year battery alarms should have the whole unit replaced after ten years
- dust can affect the sensors, so periodically remove dust by vacuuming the alarm gently using a soft brush attachment

Getting more help and advice

Lambeth is currently offering free battery-operated smoke alarms to residents in high-rise blocks who request them. Please contact HMfiresafety@lambeth.gov.uk for more details.

What to do in the event of a fire

Make sure that you are familiar with the evacuation plan for your block. This will let you know the safe routes out of the building.

Our advice in the event of a fire follows the guidance issued nationally by the fire services, which is to "*stay put*" unless your flat is being affected by fire or smoke. The structure of the building is designed to give 30-60 minutes protection, enabling you to remain in your flat while the fire service extinguishes the fire.

If there is a fire elsewhere in the building, it is usually safer to stay in your flat unless the smoke or heat from the fire is affecting you, in which case you can leave via the stairs if it is safe to do so. If it is not safe to leave your flat, call **999** and tell them which flat you are in.

If there is a fire within your flat

If there is a fire within your own flat, the advice is to alert all the people in your flat and leave, closing your doors behind you. You should follow the escape plan and if there is lots of smoke, crawl along the floor where the air should be clearer. Always use the stairs rather than the lift and call **999** as soon as you are in a safe place.