

Fire safety in the home
Information and advice





Smoking

The fires caused by smoking (including cigarettes, roll-ups, cigars and pipe tobacco) result in more deaths than any other type of fire.

Prevent smoking related fires

- It is safer to smoke outside but make sure cigarettes are put right out and disposed of properly
- Never smoke in bed
- Don't smoke in an armchair or sofa if you think you may fall asleep.

- Take extra care when you're tired, taking prescription drugs or if you've been drinking alcohol
- Use proper ashtrays which can't tip over and stub cigarettes out properly
- Never balance cigars or cigarettes on the edge of an ashtray or anything else; they can fall and cause a fire
- Don't leave lit pipes or cigarettes unattended
- Empty ashtrays carefully. Make sure smoking materials are out, cold and preferably wet them before throwing into a bin - never use a wastepaper basket
- Don't smoke counterfeit cigarettes; they can cause fires because of the way they are made
- Keep matches and lighters out of children's reach, and buy child-resistant lighters
- Never smoke if you use medical oxygen or an air flow pressure relief mattress
- If you use paraffin-based emollient creams, ask for non-flammable alternatives instead
- Consider additional safety measures such as fire retardant bedding or nightwear.



Electronic cigarettes

The use of electronic cigarettes has increased in recent years; they are safer to use as long as the manufacturers' instructions are followed.

- Use only the battery and charger that's provided with the e-cigarette
- Avoid leaving an e-cigarette on charge overnight
- Never use a damaged e-cigarette
- Never use e-cigarettes close to medical oxygen.

Cooking

More fires and fire injuries are caused by carelessness in the kitchen than anywhere else in the home. Heat alarms fitted in kitchens can detect the increase in temperature caused by a fire but will not be set off by cooking fumes.

Prevent cooking fires

- Fit a heat alarm and test it monthly
- Avoid leaving cooking unattended. If you have to leave the kitchen whilst cooking, it's safer to take pans off the heat and turn off the hob and/or grill
- Don't cook if you are tired, have been drinking alcohol or taking medication that might make you drowsy
- Loose clothing can easily catch fire - take care not to lean over a hot hob and keep tea towels and cloths away from the cooker and hob
- Keep the oven, hob, cooker hood and grill clean, and in good working order. A build up of fat and grease can ignite and cause a fire
- Use spark devices to light gas cookers
- Double check the cooker and hob are turned off when you've finished cooking
- Check toasters are clean and not placed under kitchen cabinets or close to anything that can catch fire
- Never put anything metal in the microwave
- Supervise children (and pets) in the kitchen at all times. Put matches away and keep saucepan handles out of their reach.

Candles and naked flames

The fire service regularly attends fires caused by candles, incense and oil burners.

Always follow this advice:

- Make sure you put out any candles, incense and oil burners when you leave the room and especially before bed
- These items should always be held firmly in heat resistant holders and placed on a stable surface
- Keep them away from materials that may catch fire such as curtains, furniture, clothes
- Tea lights get very hot and without proper holders can melt through plastic surfaces like a TV or bath
- To avoid accidents keep candles and other naked flames out of reach of children and pets.

Portable heaters and open fires

Heaters placed too close to flammable materials cause fires, burns and deaths every year.

Open fires and log burners

- Keep chimneys and flues clean and well maintained. Always have your chimney swept by a specialist (at least once a year for coal)
- Make sure you use a fire guard to protect against flying sparks and hot embers
- Before you go to bed, make sure fires or hot embers are under control and guarded
- Store logs away from solid fuel burners. Radiated heat can cause them to burn
- Grand Union will sweep your chimney for free.

Electrics

Electrical fires are common, but many can be easily avoided.

Scorch marks, flickering lights, hot plugs and sockets, fuses that blow or circuit-breakers that trip for no obvious reasons could all be signs of loose or dangerous wiring. If in doubt get them checked by a qualified electrician.

Prevent electrical fires

- Make sure electrical appliances have a British or European safety mark when you buy them
- Keep electrical appliances clean and in good working order
- Empty fluff regularly from tumble dryers in line with the manufacturer's instructions
- Hair straighteners get extremely hot. Always switch them off and leave them to cool on a heatproof surface
- Keep to one plug per socket. High powered appliances, such as washing machines, should have a single socket to themselves
- Always check that you're using the right fuse, typical examples include:
3A fuse - Table lamp, television, computer, blender, fridge, freezer.
13A fuse - Washing machine, dishwasher, microwave, kettle, toaster, iron
- If you have to use an adaptor, use a fused 'in line' type but don't overload it by adding extra plug-in adaptors or using high current appliances such as electric heaters. Know the limits
- Cable drum extension leads should be completely unwound to avoid overheating.

Remember

In the event of a power cut call 105 - It's free of charge and will put you through to your local electricity network operator who can give you help and advice. If you or someone you know may need extra support during a power cut go to:

www.ukpowernetworks.co.uk/power-cut/priority-services-register

Battery and charging safety

Re-chargeable batteries, when used safely, power millions of devices every day such as mobile phones, laptops, tablets and mobility scooters. However batteries can present a fire risk when over-charged, short-circuited, submerged in water or if their cases are damaged. Follow these safety tips when charging your devices.

- Always use the charger that came with your phone, tablet, e-cigarette or mobile device or a genuine replacement. Counterfeit electrical chargers can be deadly, and many fail to meet UK safety regulations leading to fires and injury
- Don't leave items continuously on charge (after the charge cycle is complete)
- Avoid storing, using or charging batteries in extremes of high or low temperatures
- Do not cover devices in use, or batteries that are on charge, in case of over heating.

Using an electric blanket

- Never use an electric blanket if you have an air flow pressure relief mattress, or use paraffin based emollient creams. Ask for non-flammable creams instead
- Store electric blankets flat, rolled up or loosely folded to prevent damaging the internal wiring
- Unplug blankets before you get into bed, unless it has a thermostat control for safe all-night use
- Do not buy second-hand electric blankets
- Check regularly for wear and tear and replace your electric blanket every 10 years.

Alarms

It's better to prevent a fire from happening, but fitting alarms will provide an early warning in the event of a fire and allow vital extra time to escape.



Making sure your alarms work

Fitting alarms save lives, but only if they are working. Test yours every month. It's as simple as pushing the button.

- Change the battery if it starts to bleep on a regular basis
- Never disconnect or take the batteries out of your alarms if they go off by mistake
- Some alarms are fitted with 10 year or long-lasting sealed batteries, these should not be removed or replaced as doing so will damage the alarms beyond repair.

Specialist alarms

Where a person has any conditions that may prevent or delay their escape, specialist alarms can be fitted.

Heat alarms fitted in kitchens can detect the increase in temperature caused by a fire but will not be set off by cooking fumes.

- Strobe light and vibrating pad alarms are available for those who are deaf or hard of hearing. For more information contact: **Action on Hearing Loss Information Line on 0808 808 0123** or **textphone 0808 808 9000**
- Where a telecare monitoring system is fitted, this should be linked to all alarms and sensors in the property
- Wherever possible fit interlinked alarms throughout your property so that when one alarm detects a fire they all go off together. This will give everyone in your home the earliest warning of fire
- Mains powered alarms should be installed by a qualified electrician.

Escape

Make an escape plan and practise it regularly to make sure everyone knows how to get out safely.

Making an escape plan

- The best route is the normal way in and out of your home
- Wherever possible, plan a second route in case the first one is blocked
- Take a few minutes to practise it regularly
- Keep door and window keys where everyone you live with can find them
- Ensure security gates can be easily opened from the inside without the need for a key
- If anyone in the home is slow to react or has mobility issues, adapt the plan to suit their needs
- Mobility aids and any methods of calling for help should always be kept close to hand (e.g mobile phone/link alarm or pendant)
- Make sure the way in and out of your home is kept clear of anything that may slow down or block your escape. This includes white goods such as freezers
- Review your plan if your circumstances change. If you need support or advice with this, contact your local fire service.

What to do if there is a fire in your home

- If any of your smoke alarms go off, never assume it is a false alarm
- Shout **'fire'** to alert others in the home
- Don't waste time investigating what's happened or rescuing valuables
- Don't tackle fires yourself, many people are injured this way. Leave it to the professionals
- Keep calm and get out, closing doors behind you to slow down the spread of fire and smoke
- Before you open a door check if it's warm with the back of your hand. If it is, don't open it, there may be a fire on the other side
- If there's smoke, keep low where the air is clearer
- Call 999 as soon as it is safe to do so - 999 calls are free
- Never go back into the building once you are safely outside.

What to do if your escape is blocked

- If you can't get out, find a safe room away from fire, ideally one with a window that opens and access to a phone
- Close the door and put bedding or any soft materials around the bottom of the door to block the smoke, then open the window and shout **"help, fire"**. If you have a phone call 999
- If you're on the ground or first floor, you may be able to escape through a window. Use soft materials to cushion your fall and lower yourself down carefully. Don't jump.

Did you know?

If you cannot make voice calls, you can contact the 999 emergency services by SMS text from your mobile phone. You will only be able to use this service if you have registered with emergency SMS first. Text 'register' to 999. You will get a reply - then follow the instructions you are sent.

Extra advice for purpose-built maisonettes or blocks of flats

Follow this advice if you live in a purpose-built maisonette or block of flats, of any height, with shared communal corridors, external walkways, staircases or entrances.

In the event of a fire

If there is a fire or smoke inside your maisonette or flat and your escape route is clear:

- Get everyone out, close the door and walk as calmly as possible out of the building
- Do not use the lift
- Call 999, give your address including the number of your flat and state which floor the fire is on.

If there is a fire or smoke inside your maisonette or flat but your escape route is **not clear:**

- It may be safer to stay in your maisonette or flat until the fire service arrives
- Close the door and use soft materials to block any gaps to stop the smoke
- Go to a window and call for help. Dial 999, give your address including the number of your flat and state which floor the fire is on.

If there is a fire in another part of the building but not inside your maisonette or flat:

- Purpose-built maisonettes or blocks of flats are built to give you some protection from fire. Walls, floors and doors will hold back flames and smoke for a minimum of 30 to 60 minutes
- If you are in your flat, you are usually safer staying there unless heat or smoke is affecting you. Stay put and call 999. Tell the fire brigade where you are and the best way to reach you
- If you are within the communal areas of the building, leave and call 999.

Consider the following as part of your plan:

- Know the fire escape plan for your building. Talk to your housing officer or landlord if you are unsure
- Make sure everyone you live with knows how to raise the alarm in the event of a fire
- Communal staircases, corridors and balconies should be kept clear of anything that may block your escape such as prams, bicycles or mobility scooters
- Household rubbish should always be taken to the refuse area immediately and not left in communal areas
- It is easy to get confused if it is dark or smoky so it's important to know your route out of the building using the exit stairs. Count the number of doors you need to go through or use familiar objects to guide you to help with your escape in the event of a fire
- Your home may be provided with an alternative escape route. Always make sure it is kept clear and you can access it at any time.

Bedtime check

Many fire deaths happen at night, when most people are sleeping. You can further reduce your risk by carrying out some simple checks before you go to bed.

Bedtime check

- A closed door can help to stop flames and smoke from spreading to other rooms, giving you and your family more time to escape
- Turn off and unplug electrical appliances unless they are designed to be left on - like your fridge or freezer
- Don't leave the washing machine, tumble dryer or dishwasher switched on
- Don't leave mobile phones, tablets or e-cigarettes charging overnight
- Check your cooker is turned off
- Turn heaters off, rake out fires and put a fire guard in place
- Put candles, incense sticks and oil burners out and never leave them burning when you are asleep
- Make sure cigarettes are completely out. It's best to wet them to be sure
- Never smoke in bed
- Escape routes should be kept clear of anything that may slow your escape down
- Keep door and window keys where everyone you live with can find them
- If you or anyone else in the home has mobility issues, ensure mobility aids and methods of calling for help are close to hand (e.g. link line pendants) in case they are needed to assist with an escape.

Your responsibilities

People living in rented or shared accommodation are seven times more likely to have a fire. As a customer, you also have responsibilities to help reduce the likelihood of a fire happening.

- You should follow advice in this booklet on how to prevent fires in the home
- You are personally responsible for making sure that any alarms within your property are working throughout the term of your tenancy; remember to test them all monthly
- Make sure your fire doors are maintained and close them before you go to bed at night.



Do you need the information in this leaflet in a different format?

Please contact us on **0300 123 5544** to discuss your specific requirements.

Equality and diversity

Grand Union Housing Group has a responsibility to ensure that equal opportunity and effective management of diversity are at the core of its business. We set targets to deliver services that are responsive to the needs of communities and individuals, and promote social inclusion.



Derwent House
Cranfield Technology Park
University Way, Cranfield
Bedfordshire MK43 0AZ



@GrandUnionHousing



@GrandUnionHG

Tel: 0300 123 5544

Email: help@guhg.co.uk

Web: www.guhg.co.uk

Office opening hours: 8.45am to 5.00pm Monday to Friday

Registered address: Derwent House, Cranfield Technology Park, University Way, Cranfield, Bedfordshire MK43 0AZ.

A registered society under the Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies Act 2014. Registered with the Homes and Communities Agency. Member of the National Housing Federation.

