



## **STUDENT ACCOMMODATION – FIRE SAFETY STANDARD**

The Fire and Rescue Authority considers the appropriate fire safety standard for all student accommodation to be that contained in the 'LACoRS' guidance - 'Housing Fire Safety'. The important points of which are outlined below.

### **1 Risk Assessment**

A fire risk assessment must be carried out on the common areas of the premises. For further information and to download a form to assist in completion of the risk assessment, please refer to the "Keeping You Safe – At Your Business" section of the North Wales Fire & Rescue Service website at [www.nwales-fireservice.org.uk](http://www.nwales-fireservice.org.uk)

### **2 Means of Escape**

#### **One or Two storeys**

As a minimum, all doors and walls should be sound, doors should be well fitting and of traditional construction.

No escape route should pass through a risk room. A risk room is defined as a room where the function, use or contents presents a risk of fire occurring and developing; typically kitchens, shared living rooms, bedsit rooms.

Limiting the travel distance from rooms to a place of safety reduces the risk of people being trapped by a fire on their escape route. This guidance recommends that 9m is an acceptable safe distance from a room exit door to a place of relative safety. This is a useful reference but need not be applied as a rigid standard, and may be increased or decreased depending upon the level of risk once the appropriate fire prevention measures have been put in place. When assessing travel distances, the distance should be considered from all parts of the premises to the nearest place of relative safety, which is:

- a protected stairway enclosure (storey exit);
- a separate fire compartment from which there is a final exit to a place of ultimate safety; or
- the nearest available final exit.

Where extended travel distances are unavoidable suitable escape windows may be considered from **all** bedrooms and living rooms. The external route from these areas will also need to lead to a place of final safety.

Escape windows can only be used if satisfied that it would be safe to use them in an emergency. Any window provided for emergency escape purposes should have an unobstructed openable area that is at least 0.33m<sup>2</sup> and have a minimum 450mm height and 450mm width. The bottom of the openable area should not be more than 1,100mm above the floor. Windows should be designed such that they will remain in the open position without needing to be held by a person making their escape. They should meet the following criteria:

- They serve rooms whose floor level is no more than 4.5m from the ground;
- Every room served by the escape window has access to it without entering another habitable room with a lockable door (unless of a type that can be overridden from outside the room without the use of a key, tool or numerical code) and any tenancy agreement should ideally prohibit the fitting of alternative or additional locks. (This will usually be achievable in single household occupancies and most shared houses, but is unlikely in a bedsit-type HMO);



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- If it is necessary to pass through the common escape route to reach the escape window, consideration should be had to the travel distance involved. Where the common escape route is not a protected route, unusually long travel distances may be unacceptable and other fire precautions may be necessary (this will not usually be the case in conventional houses);
- Occupiers are able-bodied individuals with no specific high-risk characteristics and who can reasonably be expected to exit via the window unaided; • there is no basement well or other encumbrance beneath the window such as railings or a conservatory;
- The escape window is openable from the inside without the use of a removable key; and the ground below is level and free of obstructions; and
- The window or door should lead to a place of ultimate safety, clear of the building. However, if there is no practical way of avoiding escape into a courtyard or back garden from where there is no exit, it should be at least as deep as the building is high.

If a basement/cellar is present, 30 minute fire separation from the escape route is ideal, but where in existing buildings, construction is of a lesser standard (for example 9mm plasterboard partitions or original lath and plaster construction). It is likely to be impracticable and uneconomic to replace such partitions as a matter of routine whenever encountered. Where they are in sound condition and good repair they may be acceptable in low risk premises of no more than two storeys with no particularly vulnerable occupants, provided that all other fire safety measures are as recommended.

### **Three or Four storeys**

A minimum construction standard of 30 minutes fire resistance and FD30 doors to all risk rooms must be provided. Smoke seals should be omitted from fire doors fitted to rooms in premises where the fire detection system is restricted to the escape route as their benefit will be outweighed by the fact that the smoke detectors in the escape route will only activate when the fire is at an advanced stage and beginning to breach the fire door. The resulting alarm may be so late sounding that the fire and smoke is already affecting the escape route. Limiting the travel distance from rooms to a place of safety reduces the risk of people being trapped by a fire on their escape route. This guidance recommends that 9m is an acceptable safe distance from a room exit door to a place of relative safety. This is a useful reference but need not be applied as a rigid standard, and may be increased or decreased depending upon the level of risk once the appropriate fire prevention measures have been put in place. When assessing travel distances, the distance should be considered from all parts of the premises to the nearest place of relative safety, which is:

- a protected stairway enclosure (storey exit);
- a separate fire compartment from which there is a final exit to a place of ultimate safety; or
- the nearest available final exit.

If a basement/cellar is present, 30 minute separation from the escape route must be provided.

### **Five storeys**

Lobby protection must be provided to all floors except the top floor or alternatively a secondary means of escape should be provided from the top floor.

Lateral fire-resisting separation of the top floor from the remainder of the house is required.

If a basement/cellar is present, at least 30 minute fire separation must be provided.



### **Six storeys**

Lobby protection must be provided to all floors except the top floor **and** a secondary means of escape must be provided from the top two floors.

Lateral fire-resisting separation of the top two floors from the remainder of the house is required.

If a basement/cellar is present, at least 30 minute fire separation must be provided.

### **All Houses**

A thumb turn device or similar easily openable lock on the inside of the final exit door should be provided so that the door may be opened from the inside **without** the use of a key. Where the escape route is long or complex, if there is secondary route, escape signage should be provided to British Standard 5499.

In the early stages of a building fire, the danger to occupants can be severely influenced by the surface linings of escape routes. The materials used to line walls and ceilings can contribute significantly to the spread of flame across their surface. Most materials that are used as surface linings will fall into one of three classes of surface spread of flame. Materials suitable for the construction of circulation spaces and escape routes are Class 0 and such materials include brickwork, blockwork, concrete, ceramic tiles, plaster finishes (including rendering on wood or metal lathes), wood-wool cement slabs and mineral fibre tiles or sheets with cement or resin binding. As regards final décor non Cellulosic paints, such as emulsion, are normally considered as acceptable.

## **3 Fire Warning System**

### **All Houses**

Provide a fire alarm and detection system in accordance with British Standard 5839 Part 6: 'Code of Practice for the Design and Installation of Fire Detection and Alarm Systems in Dwellings' to the appropriate standard.

You are reminded that the alarm system may be wired into the local lighting circuit.

A certificate of commissioning and installation for the fire alarm system will be required in order to show compliance with current standards.

## **4 Lighting of Escape Routes**

### **One or Two storeys**

Conventional artificial lighting at all levels is required.

### **Three or Four storeys**

Emergency escape lighting is required if the route is long or complex or where there is no effective borrowed lighting. Escape lighting complying with British standard 5266 should be provided.

Conventional artificial lighting at all levels is required.

### **Five or Six storeys**

Emergency escape lighting is required. Escape lighting complying with British standard 5266 should be provided. Conventional artificial lighting at all levels is required.

## **5 Fire fighting equipment**

### **All Houses**

A fire blanket should be provided in the kitchen.

If your fire risk assessment identifies that the provision of fire fighting equipment would be necessary to secure safe escape for your tenants then it should be provided along with suitable training in its use.

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It will not usually be practical to train tenants in the use of these, but basic advice should be offered at the start of each new tenancy.

## **6 Further Guidance**

For further guidance relating to fire safety in student accommodation you are advised to obtain a copy of the guide 'HOUSING – FIRE SAFETY' Guidance on fire safety provisions for certain types of existing housing' published by LACORS (ISBN 978-1-84049-638-3) and is available through any good bookseller, or can be downloaded for free from <http://www.lacors.gov.uk/lacors/upload/19175.pdf>