

# Staying fire safe at home

How to reduce the risk of fire in your home  
and keep yourself and your family safe



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## Fire safety is everyone's responsibility

For many of us our home is where we feel most safe and secure, however there are around 37,000 house fires in the UK every year! From testing your smoke alarms regularly and keeping escape routes clear, to having an evacuation plan in mind, there are many ways we can stay fire safe at home. In this leaflet you can find out more about the steps you can take to prevent a fire, and what we're doing to keep you safe.

We're sharing this information with you as part of the latest Fire Safety Legislation that came into force at the beginning of 2023. The new legislation sets out guidelines on how we should look after our buildings and share information with tenants. It pays particular attention to the importance of maintaining flat doors to ensure these perform as needed, which you can find more information about on page 13.



# Smoke alarms save lives

Having smoke alarms installed in your home is one of the best ways to keep you and your family safe. They'll give you an advanced warning of a fire, meaning you have more time to react and get out safely.

**In the event of a fire, you may have as little as two minutes to escape, so having a working smoke alarm in your home is crucial.**

## How do I test my smoke alarm?

Testing your smoke alarm is simple. All you need to do is find the button labelled 'test' on your detector, push it in and hold for a few seconds. If it's working correctly, you should hear the alarm sound loud and clear from every room in the house.

## How often should I test my alarm?

You should get into the habit of testing all of your alarms weekly, to ensure they're in full working order. To help you remember and get into a routine, you may find it useful to set a reminder on your phone. This could alert you every week at a time you're guaranteed to be at home, so you know

it's time to test your alarms. The elderly or those with mobility issues may struggle to test their smoke alarms by themselves, so offer to help them if you can.

## Why is my alarm sounding?

If the alarm on your smoke detector sounds, the first thing you should do is identify if there's a fire in your home. In the event of a fire, make sure everyone is safely evacuated and dial 999. Your smoke detector will sound the alarm if it senses combustible products in the air. It will be a loud, continuous alarm that will sound until the air has cleared.

## Some other reasons your smoke alarm may be beeping include:

### It needs cleaning

Your smoke alarm will get dirty and dusty, and this can sometimes cause it to beep. You should gently clean your detector every

month using the soft brush attachment on your vacuum. This will remove anything clogging up the sensors.

### A loose or poorly installed battery

If you are certain that it's a false alarm, your smoke detector may be sounding because the battery is loose or hasn't been installed correctly. You can follow the steps on the next page to make sure this is installed properly.

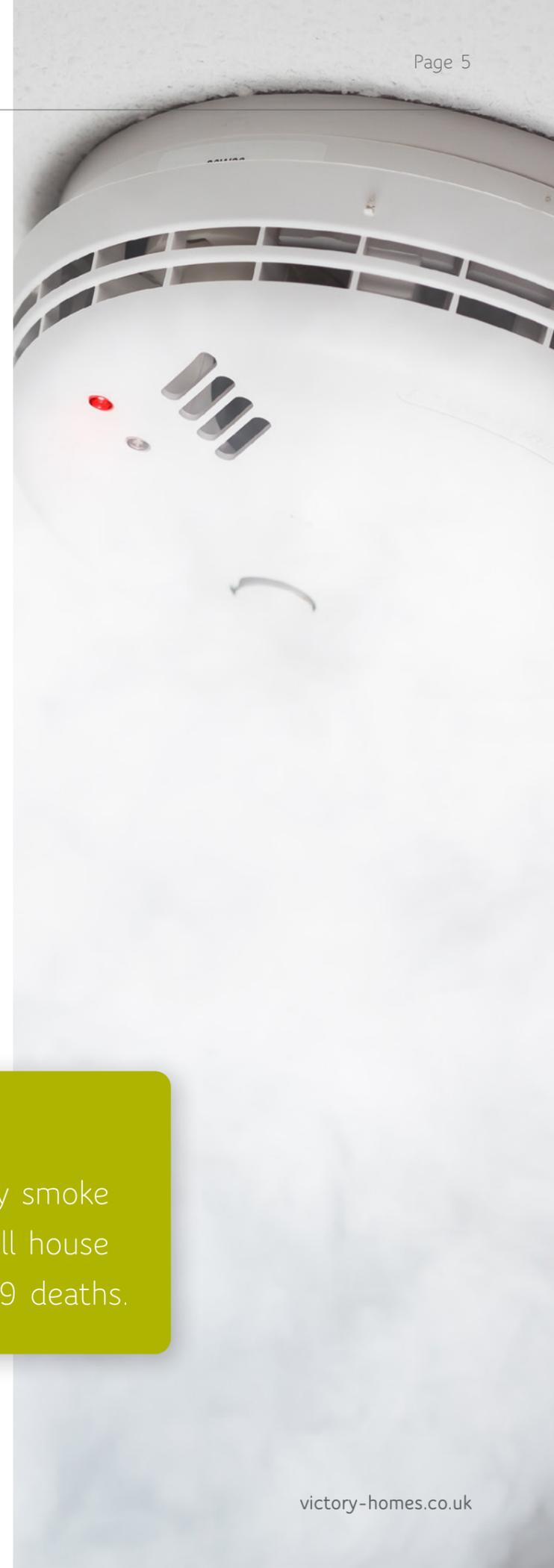
### The battery needs changing

If you can hear a constant chirping sound coming from your smoke alarm (rather than the fire alarm noise), this will usually be because the battery needs replacing.

**Follow the step-by-step process on the next page when you need to change your smoke alarm battery.**

## Did you know?

Homes with no alarms or faulty smoke alarms accounted for 25% of all house fires between 2020-21, and 129 deaths.



# Changing the battery in your smoke alarm

Most smoke alarms will make a regular chirping noise to let you know that it's time to change the battery. However, many of our smoke alarms have a ten year lithium battery, which means these can't be changed and the alarm will need to be replaced. If your detector starts beeping, please give us a call before attempting to change the battery yourself. We'll be able to identify what type of detector you have in your home and decide the best course of action.

## Follow the simple steps below to change your battery:

- 1 Remove the smoke alarm cover (it should unclip from the base with a slight twisting motion)
- 2 Take out the old battery from its holder
- 3 Replace with a new battery (check the manufacturer's instructions to make sure you install a battery of the right voltage)
- 4 Put the cover back on
- 5 Press the 'test' button to check the new battery is working, you should hear the alarm sound

**Never remove the battery in your smoke alarm without immediately replacing it with a new one. You could forget to put a new battery in, putting yourself and those living in your household at risk.**

If you live in a block of flats, our Fire Safety Officers will test the smoke detectors in your communal areas once a month. Our contractors, English Security, will also test them fully once a year, however if you spot any problems, you should always report this to us by calling **0330 123 1860** and selecting the option for repairs.



# Fire hazards around the home

There are lots of different fire hazards to look out for around your home, but faulty electrics cause around 4,000 home fires across the UK every year! Our household appliances make our everyday lives much easier, but if not used correctly they could start a fire. So what hazards should you be aware of and look out for?

## Cables and leads

Plugging too many electrical appliances into one socket can lead to overheating and potentially cause a fire. Although extension leads do have space to plug in multiple appliances, this doesn't mean it's safe to do so. Check cables and leads regularly for signs of fraying or damage and keep them away from water and sources of heat. Extension leads that are coiled or rolled up will often need to be unfolded before use to stop them from overheating.

## Plugs and sockets

You should regularly check your plugs and sockets for burn marks and loose wiring, and if they feel hot or the fuses blow for no reason, stop using them and contact an electrician. Look out for any coloured wires sticking out of plugs, as this often means they are wired incorrectly which could lead

to a fire. Only use a single plug per socket, and if you need more sockets, use a bar-type extension cable. If you use one of these don't plug in more than 13 amps in total and avoid using it for high-powered appliances such as washing machines or kettles.

## Lighting

Especially during the darker months, you may use different types of lighting to brighten up your home. It's important that you choose the correct bulb for the fitting, as using the wrong type or one with too high of a wattage could cause your electrics to trip and even cause a fire. Make sure you keep lamps and bulbs away from curtains or other fabrics, as these can get hot and easily set materials alight. Choose LED bulbs which stay cool even when in use, and always use a qualified electrician.

## Candles caused 200 home fires in 2022

Candles may not be a handy household appliance, but many of us use these to make our homes look warm and inviting and they're one of the most serious fire hazards to be aware of. When burning a candle, make sure you position it on a fireproof surface and keep it away from flammable items such as curtains or fabrics. You should never leave a candle unattended even for a few seconds, so always be sure to put it out before leaving the room. To avoid any accidents, keep candles, matches and lighters, out of the reach of children and pets.

Why not try battery-powered LED candles instead? These are much safer to use around your home and outside, as you can leave them unattended and don't have to worry about pets or children knocking them over. You can even buy flickering lights in a variety of colours!

## Mobility and E-Scooters

Mobility and E-Scooters are becoming more common, and these need to be stored properly and taken care of. If you live in a block of flats, you should never store or charge your scooter in communal areas or near escape routes. If there were a fire, these would stop people from escaping the building quickly and safely. Your scooter should be stored in a cool place, ideally in a dedicated storage unit. Only use the manufacturer-approved charger with your scooter and only charge it when you're awake and at home. If you need to dispose of any batteries, you can check for recycling services in your area. Never throw away batteries with your household rubbish as they could be crushed and cause a fire.

## Washing machines and dryers

You may be surprised to know that a washing machine or dryer could go up in flames, but these are large electrical appliances and must be used correctly. You should never leave these appliances running when you're out of the house or at night when you're sleeping. If you did do this and these were to catch fire, the fire would have more time to develop before you were aware of it. You should clean the filter in your tumble dryer after each use and be

aware of any burning smells, as this would indicate that something isn't quite right.

## Digital devices

It's likely that you own some sort of digital device, whether that's a mobile phone, tablet or laptop. To help keep yourself safe, you should only use the manufacturer's charging cable to charge these devices. Don't be tempted to buy cheaper alternatives online, as these could be dangerous and potentially cause a fire. Avoid charging your devices overnight and especially underneath your pillow, as they can get very hot.

## Electric blankets

When the weather gets cooler, an electric blanket is great to keep yourself cosy and warm. Although they're a cost-efficient way to stay warm, they can cause a fire if not used correctly. You can use the blanket to heat up your bed but always switch it off before going to sleep. You should also check your blanket regularly for wear and tear and make sure it's still in good condition. If there are any signs of damage, it's always best to replace the blanket altogether. Lastly, you should never buy an electric blanket secondhand as this could compromise your safety.

# Keeping communal areas clear and safe

Your safety is our priority, and we want to ensure you feel happy and comfortable in your community.

We have a Keep Clear & Safe policy, which is designed to keep everyone safe in our communal areas and ensure they can escape quickly in an emergency.

It's everyone's responsibility to keep these spaces free of personal belongings to limit the spread of a fire and ensure escape routes are kept clear.

## Follow the three golden rules:

### 1. Keep belongings inside your home

Whether it's a small pot plant, or something much bigger like a mobility scooter or pushchair – if it's yours, please store it inside your home.

### 2. Leave any repairs to the experts

If you think the fire alarm or smoke detection systems are broken or faulty, get in touch and we'll send out an electrician. That's part of our responsibility as your landlord.

### 3. Please don't wedge fire doors open

Even on the hottest summer days, let the doors close. If you need the doors open for a little while, maybe to bring your shopping in, that's OK, but please make sure you close them when you're finished.

# Evacuating your home in the event of a fire

## Plan your escape route

In the event of a fire every second counts, so it's important that you know your escape route and have a well-practised evacuation plan. You should practise it regularly with others in your household, including children, so that everyone knows how to get outside quickly and safely. Your best escape route is usually your normal way in and out of your home, but you should have an alternative route in mind in case the main exit is blocked. Make sure the keys to doors and windows are easily accessible and that everyone knows where they are.

The same applies if you live in a block of flats, and you should make sure you're familiar with the evacuation plan and the escape routes. It's easy to get confused in smoke, so count how many doors you need to go through to reach the stairs and make sure these doors aren't locked. Always avoid using lifts or balconies if there's a fire.

## What to do if your escape route is blocked

If there's a fire and you can't get out, get everyone into one room that has a window, and bring a phone if you can. Put bedding around the bottom of the door to block out the smoke, then open a window and call for help. If you're on the ground or first floor, and can escape through a window, use bedding to cushion your fall and lower yourself gently – don't jump! If you can't open the window, break the glass in the bottom corner and use a towel or blanket to make jagged edges safe.

# The importance of fire doors

Fire doors provide a lot of protection, as they are made from materials that work together to slow down or stop the spread of a fire in your home.

If you live in a block of flats there will be several fire doors in your building, and these include your own front door and those in communal areas. It's important that these remain closed, to help protect yourself and your neighbours.

These doors are there to keep you safe, and our Fire Safety Officers will inspect these to make sure they're working correctly. The communal fire doors in your building will be inspected every three months, and if you live in a building over 11 metres tall, your flat entrance door will be inspected once a year.

**Our Fire Safety Officers will check your fire doors each time they visit, but if you do spot something that's not quite right, please report it to us by calling 0330 123 1860.**

## Your flat entrance fire door

### Do:

- ✓ Keep your door in good condition and let us know immediately if there are any issues, such as the door doesn't close properly, or it has been significantly damaged.
- ✓ Keep your door free of any obstructions. The space in front of and behind a fire door should always be kept clear, so that it can open and close properly.

### Don't:

- ✗ Decorate your door with signs, wreaths or even coat hooks, as these can add fuel to the fire which can cause flaming and stop the door from providing protection.
- ✗ Hang signs, curtains, or blinds directly on or over the fire protection rated glass on the door. Items attached to the glass and glazing could ignite allowing the fire to spread to other areas of the building.

## Your communal fire doors

### Do:

- ✓ Keep your door in good condition and let us know immediately if there are any issues, or if it has been significantly tampered with.
- ✓ Keep your door free of any obstructions. The space in front of and behind a fire door should always be kept clear, so that it can open and close properly.

### Don't:

- ✗ Wedge fire doors open at any time.
- ✗ Disconnect the closing device on the door if there is one installed.
- ✗ Interfere with any electronic devices which hold the fire doors open. These doors will automatically close when the fire alarm is activated.



# Smoking safely

Giving up smoking is the best way to protect yourself and your family from a fire. However, if you're struggling to quit, there are a few things you can do to help reduce the risks and keep everyone in your household safe.

## Ensure cigarettes are extinguished properly

After you've finished with your cigarette, make sure you put it out completely and don't throw cigarette butts from your balcony as they could start a fire somewhere else.

## Never smoke in bed

If you need to lie down, don't light up your cigarette, as you could fall asleep and set your bed on fire. You should take extra care if you're tired or have been drinking alcohol, as it's easy to fall asleep while your cigarette is still burning.

## Don't leave lit pipes or cigarettes unattended

If they're left unattended or resting on the edge of an ashtray, they can easily tip and fall as they burn away.

## Use deep, heavy ashtrays which can't tip over

Deep and heavy ashtrays are safer to use as they are more stable. Don't empty your ashtray into the bin, instead add a small drop of water to the ashtray to make it safe and leave it to cool down.

## Try to smoke outside

It's much safer to smoke outside of your home if you can. If you're smoking in your garden or communal area, take care when disposing of your cigarette by making sure it's fully extinguished. You should also be respectful of your neighbours and reduce the amount of smoke drifting over to their garden.

## Keep matches and lighters away from children

You should keep smoking materials out of sight and reach of children and buy child-resistant lighters.



### Smoke free homes

In line with the Government's aim to make all homes smoke free by 2030, we're promoting our homes as smoke free, to encourage a healthier home for you and help to reduce the risk of fire within your home.

Whether it's to improve your own health or to protect those around you, if you've decided you want to quit smoking or vaping, then we're here to support you. We can talk you through the health benefits, and let you know where to find further information and guidance.

You can visit [victory-homes.co.uk/support-and-wellbeing](https://victory-homes.co.uk/support-and-wellbeing) to find out more or head to [nhs.uk/better-health/quit-smoking](https://nhs.uk/better-health/quit-smoking) where you can find your local stop smoking service.

### Did you know?

Cigarettes cause a quarter of all fires in the home.

# Fire safety checklists

Before you head off to bed or leave your home for a long period of time, it's important that you carry out some simple fire safety checks. Prevention is the best way to protect yourself and your family from a fire and adding a few extra minutes onto your evening routine could save your life.

## Calling it a night?

- Blow out any candles that are burning
- Check all cooking equipment is switched off
- Unplug any devices which have been charging
- Close all internal doors to prevent smoke from spreading through your home
- Turn off dishwashers, tumble dryers and washing machines so that they aren't running overnight
- Double check that any cigarettes are fully extinguished – you can wet them to be sure
- Make sure door and window keys are easily accessible
- Remove anything that is obstructing your escape routes

## Going on holiday?

- Turn off and unplug all electrical appliances that aren't needed while you're away, except for appliances such as fridges and freezers
- Unplug any devices which have been charging
- Close all internal doors to prevent a fire spreading easily through your home and causing damage
- Ask a neighbour or relative if they can keep an eye on your home whilst you're away
- Test your smoke alarms before going away so that if a fire starts, your neighbours will be alerted

### Let us know if something doesn't seem right

If you notice a fault in your home or communal area, please let us know as soon as possible. Whether it's a problem with your fire door, or your smoke alarm isn't working properly you can report it to us:

☎ 0330 123 1860

🌐 [victory-homes.co.uk/repairs](https://victory-homes.co.uk/repairs)



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