

FIRE SAFETY IN FLATS



HERTFORDSHIRE & WORCESTER
HWFR
FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

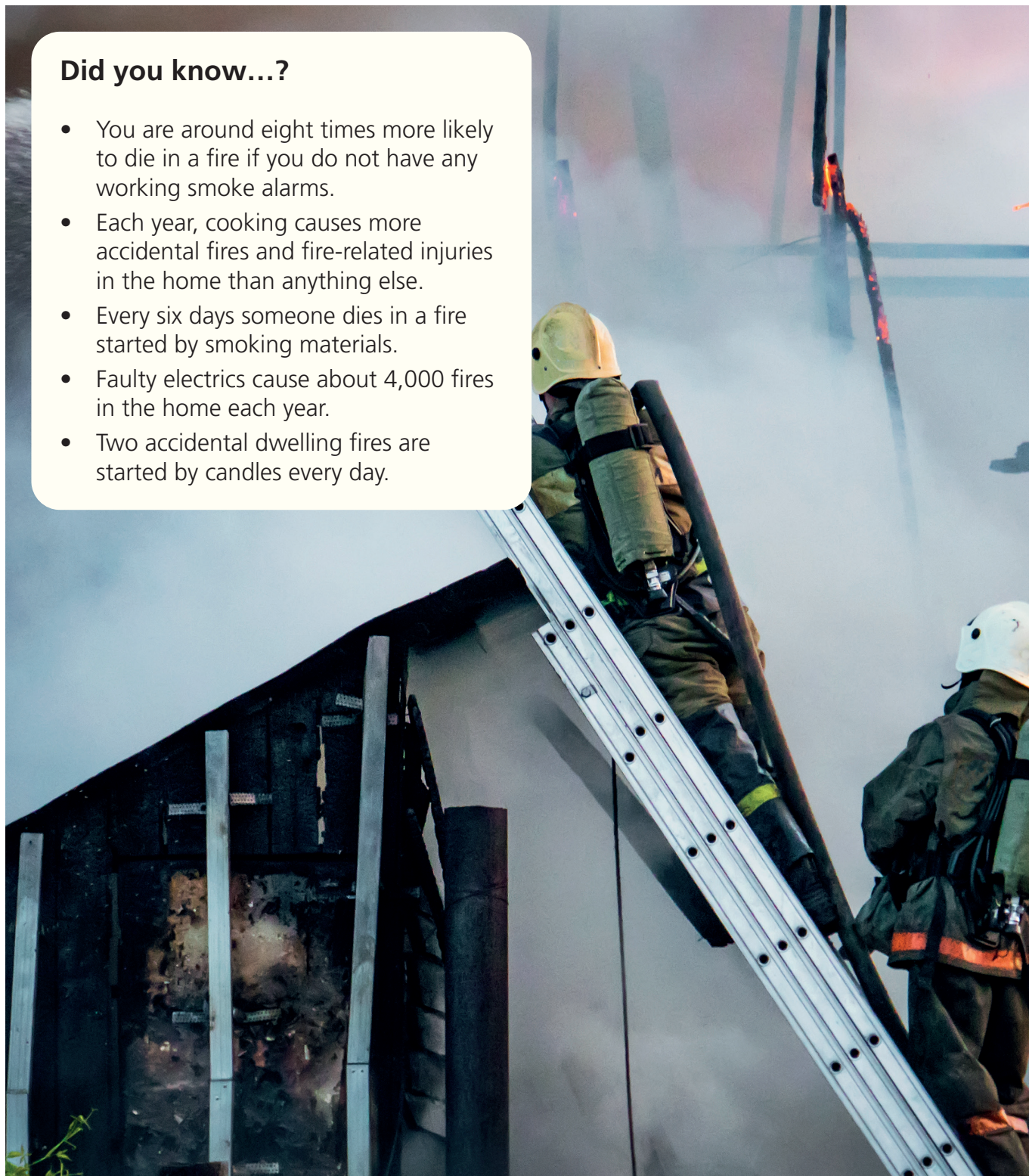


Introduction

This leaflet is for people living in flats, for landlords and for those responsible for residential buildings. The advice and tips provided here supplement our main Fire Safety in the Home leaflet.

Did you know...?

- You are around eight times more likely to die in a fire if you do not have any working smoke alarms.
- Each year, cooking causes more accidental fires and fire-related injuries in the home than anything else.
- Every six days someone dies in a fire started by smoking materials.
- Faulty electrics cause about 4,000 fires in the home each year.
- Two accidental dwelling fires are started by candles every day.



Landlord obligations

The person responsible for your block – usually a landlord, managing agent or building owner – must take steps to prevent fires breaking out in the communal areas and to protect escape routes. They should also give you instructions on what to do if a fire breaks out in your block.

The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005:

The Fire Safety Order requires the responsible person to:

- undertake and review regularly a fire risk assessment of parts of the building that are not private homes;
- put in place and maintain adequate and appropriate fire precautions to reduce the risk of fire in those areas, and;
- ensure suitable escape routes are available, kept clear and maintained to allow a safe exit from the building should that be necessary.

If the responsible person does not have the capacity or expertise, they must seek professional advice.

Housing legislation:

A range of laws place additional responsibilities on landlords to ensure fire safety within the properties they let:

- Fit at least one smoke alarm on every floor of the flat used as living accommodation and test them on the first day of each new tenancy.
- Fit carbon monoxide alarms in all rooms that contain a solid fuel-burning appliance and are used as living accommodation, and test them on the first day of each new tenancy.
- Ensure all gas and electric appliances are safe and maintained in good working order.
- Ensure all electrical installations are inspected and tested by a qualified and competent person at least every five years and provide Electrical Incident Condition Reports to tenants and housing associations on request.
- Any furniture and furnishings supplied must comply with the Furniture and Furnishings (Fire) (Safety) Regulations 1988.

Responsibility for maintaining the smoke and carbon monoxide alarms falls to the tenant after the first day test.

Make sure you recognise these symbols – they show your appliances and furnishings are safe



Electrical items



**Gas fitting
and repair**



**Soft
furnishings**

If you are worried that your landlord isn't doing enough to ensure your safety, contact your local council or your local fire and rescue authority. Both have enforcement powers that can be used to bring fire safety standards up to the required level.

Housing authority obligations

- Before letting a home, a social landlord must carry out a thorough risk assessment to identify and remove any fire hazards in the home.
- This must include consideration of any household vulnerabilities, such as children, the elderly, or those with disabilities or illnesses, such as dementia.
- It is best practice for social landlords to provide fire safety information to tenants, making them aware of their responsibilities in the home.
- Throughout the tenancy, landlords must ensure homes are free of fire hazards as defined by the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS).

Your responsibilities as a resident

Your landlord and managing agent have a duty to take steps to prevent fires breaking out in the communal areas, but there are a few things you can do to help:

- Don't obstruct the communal areas, stairs, corridors and landings, these often form the fire escape routes for the building.
- Don't prop open fire doors in communal areas.
- Don't store prams, bicycles or mobility scooters in communal areas without the permission of the landlord or managing agent.
- If you see anything in the communal areas that doesn't belong there, check who it belongs to or tell your landlord or managing agent.
- Manage your home contents – don't store anything that might catch fire or burn in cupboards that have electrical equipment (especially items such as consumer units/fuse boards) unless they have been specifically designed for safe storage.
- You must allow access for essential maintenance.
- You should report to your landlord any damage to the building structure that could compromise fire safety (e.g fire doors).
- Many blocks of flats are built to resist fire spreading between individual flats and communal areas – this is called compartmentation. To protect the compartmentation, report any damage to the landlord.
- Before doing any DIY, check with your landlord that this will not affect any of the fire safety features in your flat.
- There may be facilities in the common areas that are installed to help fire and rescue services in an emergency, such as dry and wet risers, opening vents and evacuation alert systems. These should be protected to prevent unauthorised access.

Your responsibilities as a leaseholder

- When carrying out changes to your flat, you should ensure that any material building alterations are agreed and checked by local building control to ensure they comply with the Building Regulations.
- If you wish to remove, replace or change your flat entrance doors in any way (including the self-closing mechanism), you should always consult your landlord or local building control body before making any such changes.

Fire and rescue services – Home fire safety visit

- Your local fire and rescue service can also offer advice on fire safety in your flat and may be able to carry out a home fire safety visit.
- The visits are completely free, and you may be eligible for free smoke alarms.

The visits focus on three key areas:

1. Identify and be aware of the potential fire risks within your home.
2. Know what to do in order to reduce or prevent these risks.
3. Put together an escape plan in case a fire does break out and ensure you have working smoke alarms.

You can arrange this by contacting your local fire and rescue service or look on the National Fire Chief Council website www.nationalfirechiefs.org.uk/Fire-and-Rescue-Services



Smoke alarms save lives

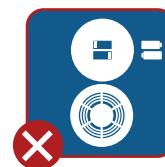
- Landlords must provide smoke alarms within your flat but you, the tenant, are personally responsible for making sure they continue to work while you're living there.

Test that your smoke alarms work

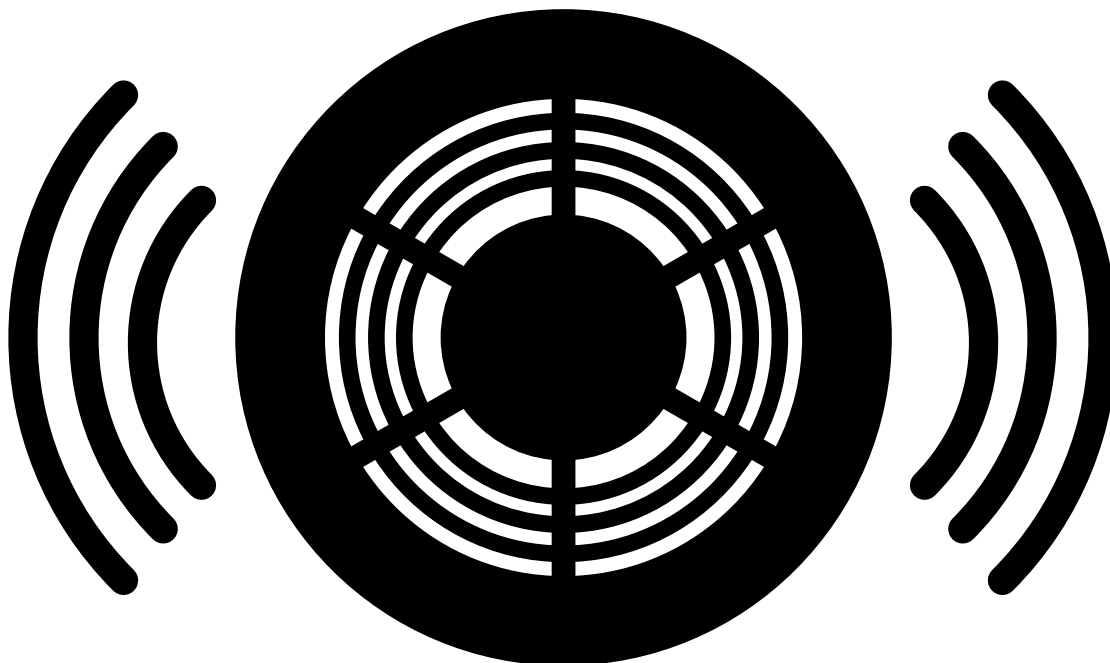
- Test your smoke alarms at least monthly by pressing the button on them.
- Make sure you have smoke alarms on every floor and that they can be heard throughout your home.
- If you press the button and there is no sound, change the batteries, or if you rent, contact your landlord
- If your smoke alarms are wired into the mains but are not working, contact an electrician. If you rent, contact your landlord.
- If your smoke alarm goes off by mistake, do not take out the batteries. Just wait for it to stop. Many alarms have a hush button that can be pressed to temporarily silence an alarm.
- Smoke alarms usually need replacing after ten years.
- If any of your smoke alarms have a one-year battery, you must change them every year. Only take out the battery when you need to replace it.
- If you hear a neighbour's smoke alarm, don't ignore it but alert the resident. If they don't respond, call 999 and ask for the fire and rescue service.



Top tip: Test it



Please don't ignore the beeping from next door



PROTECT YOUR HOME WITH SMOKE ALARMS

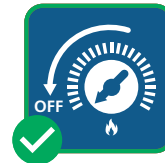


Preventing fires in your flat

In the kitchen:

Cooking safely

- Take extra care if you need to leave the kitchen whilst cooking, take pans off the heat or turn them down to avoid risk.
- Avoid cooking under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs.
- Avoid leaving children in the kitchen alone. Keep matches and saucepan handles out of their reach.
- Keep tea towels and clothes away from the cooker and hob.
- Double check the cooker is off when you've finished cooking.



Take care with electrics

- Keep electrics (leads and appliances) away from water.
- Check toasters are clean and placed away from curtains and kitchen rolls.
- Don't put anything metal in the microwave unless its designed to take them.



Deep fat frying

- Make sure your food is dry before putting it in hot oil.
- If the oil starts to smoke – it's too hot. Turn off the heat and leave it to cool.
- Do not use a chip pan. Use a thermostat controlled electric deep fat fryer. They can't overheat.



**Keep out
of reach**

What to do if a pan catches fire

- Don't take any risks. Never move the pan. Never throw water over it.
- Turn off the heat if it's safe to do so.
- Don't tackle the fire yourself.
- Close the door to the kitchen if possible
- Get out. Stay out. Call 999.



**GET OUT
STAY OUT
AND CALL
999**



Electrics

Be extra careful with electrics

- Always use appliances in line with manufacturers' instructions.
- Overloading electrical sockets, extension or adaptors is dangerous and increases the risk of fire.
- Certain appliances, such as washing machines or electric heaters that use a lot of electricity, should not be plugged into leads or adaptors.
- Unplug appliances when you're not using them, they are fully charged, or when you go to bed.
- Always check that electrical items, especially white goods, are registered (this can be done at registermyappliance.org.uk) so that you can be informed if there is a safety issue. If you are gifted or inherit electrical items, check that they are not subject to a safety recall (this can be done at productrecall.campaign.gov.uk/)
- Look out for signs of loose wiring, faulty plugs, sockets or fuses, such as scorch marks or flickering lights.
- Inform your landlord immediately if you're concerned about the electrics in your home – this includes damage such as broken switches or sockets.
- Don't fix faulty electrics yourself, inform your landlord or call a qualified electrician.



Top tip:
Don't overload



Know the limit!
5+5+3=13 (AMP)

Portable heaters

- Try to locate heaters away from foot traffic, such as near to walls, to prevent accidental contact or stop them from being knocked over. Don't use heaters for drying clothes. Sitting too close to heaters can lead to a risk of burns, particularly for vulnerable people.
- Keep them clear from curtains and furniture.



Keep away
from fabric

Using electric blankets

- Unplug the blanket before you get into bed unless it has thermostatic controls for safe all-night use.
- Store electric blankets flat, rolled up or loosely folded.
- Avoid buying second hand electric blankets.
- Check regularly for wear and tear, and always follow manufacturer's instructions.

Be careful with cigarettes

- Make sure cigarettes are put out properly after you have finished with them.
- Smoke outdoors and put cigarettes right out – this is safer than smoking indoors.
- Never smoke in bed.
- Use a proper ashtray – never a waste paper bag or other unsafe item.
- Make sure your ashtray cannot trip over and is made of a material that won't burn.
- Don't leave a lit cigarette, cigar, or pipe lying around. They can easily fall over and start a fire.
- Take extra care if you smoke when you are tired, taking prescription drugs, or if you have been drinking. You might fall asleep and set your bed or sofa on fire.
- Keep matches and lighters out of children's reach.
- Only buy child resistant lighters and match boxes.
- Never smoke illegally manufactured cigarettes.



Be safe with candles

- Be extra careful if you have been drinking alcohol or are taking medication.
- Be careful with candles and tea lights. Avoid placing them where they can be easily knocked over, or on or near materials that could burn or catch fire, like curtains.
- Put out candles when you leave the room, and make sure they are out completely at night. Do not leave children alone with candles.



Balcony Safety

- Never use barbecues, including disposable ones on your balcony. They pose a fire and carbon monoxide risk.
- Fire pits, patio heaters and chimineas should also not be used on balconies.
- Never store flammable or hazardous materials (i.e. gas cylinders) on balconies.
- Keep balconies clutter free. They should not be used for storage. Balconies can be an important escape route for residents or access point for firefighters.
- Do not use or set off fireworks or sky lanterns from a balcony.
- White goods (e.g. washing machines) should not be stored or used on balconies.
- Do not modify your balcony or install combustible screening.
- Avoid smoking on your balcony. If you do smoke on a balcony, do not discard cigarettes or smoking materials on or over the balcony. Use a sturdy ashtray with a small amount of water in it to ensure materials are extinguished.



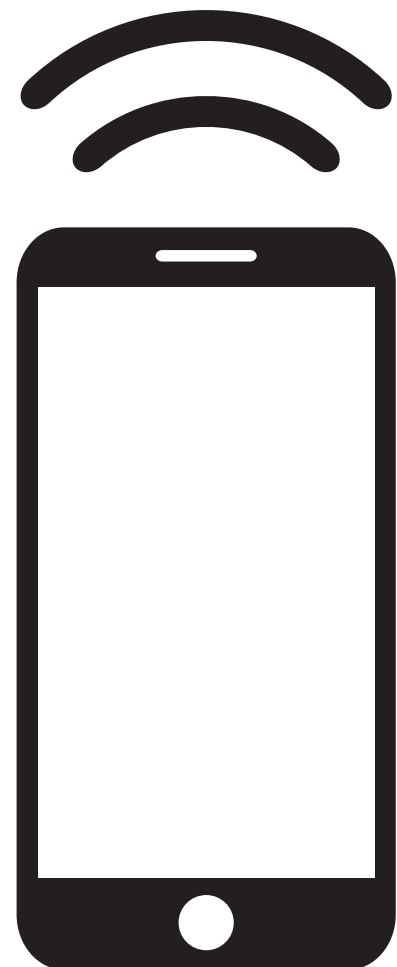
What to do if there's a fire or smoke in your flat

- Never tackle a fire yourself. Leave it to the fire and rescue service.
- Keep calm but act quickly, get everyone out.
- Children may need to be woken up as they may not hear the sound of the alarm.
- Don't waste time investigating what's happened or rescuing valuables.
- If there's smoke, keep low to the floor where the air is clearer.
- Before you open a door check if it's warm. If it is, don't open it - fire is on the other side.
- Close the doors on the way out.
- Alert any neighbours who might be at risk from the fire, without putting yourself in danger.
- Use the stairs and never use the lifts, even if you are high up.
- Call 999 as soon as you're clear of the building – 999 calls are free.

Remember – Get out. Stay out. Call 999

What if you cannot get out?

- If your escape route is blocked by fire or smoke, stay inside the safest room with a window that opens and call the fire and rescue service by calling 999. This will also help firefighters know where you are, and you can get help over the phone.
- Keep the door closed and use towels or bedding at the bottom of the door to block the smoke, then open the window and shout "HELP FIRE". Wait to be rescued by a firefighter.



What to do if you are high up

- In the event of a fire, you should not use the lifts.
- If you can, go down the stairs.
- If you're on the ground floor only, you may be able to escape through a window.
- Use bedding to cushion your fall and lower yourself down carefully. Don't jump.
- If you can't open the window break the glass in the bottom corner. Make jagged edges safe as possible with a towel or blanket.



If your clothes are on fire

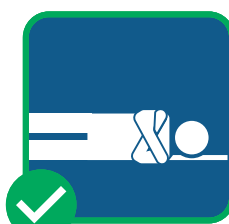
- Do not run about, it will make the fire worse.
- Lie down and roll around. The fire will get smaller. Use a coat to put out the rest of the fire.



STOP!



DROP!



ROLL!

If there is a fire in another part of the building

- Blocks of flats are normally built in a way to prevent fires spreading from one flat to another, or to the communal areas. Therefore, if there is a fire in another part of your block it is usually best to stay in your flat. This is known as 'stay put'.
- Leaving the flat when you're not affected by smoke or the fire can place you in greater danger and can hamper the fire and rescue service response.
- Ask your landlord what evacuation strategy applies to your block so you know what to do should a fire occur in someone else's flat – it may be that 'stay put' is not suitable for your block.
- The fire and rescue service may trigger a full evacuation, in which case you'll need to get out and stay out.
- If you feel unsafe, or your flat is affected by heat or smoke, then get out, stay out and call 999.
- If your escape route is blocked or full of smoke or fire, return to your flat and call 999 so firefighters know where you are and can give you help over the phone.

Plan an escape route

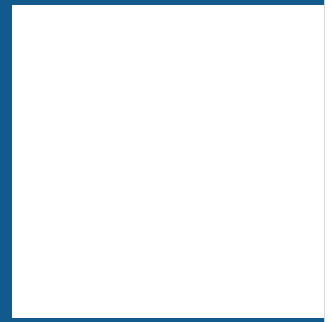
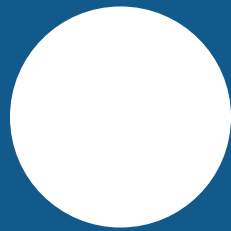
Think in advance of what you would do if there was a fire in your flat or elsewhere in your building where you may need to evacuate:

- Establish where the fire exits and alarms are.
- It is easy to get confused in smoke, so it's important to know how many doors you need to go through to reach the stairs.
- Your own flat may have more than one escape route, for example doors leading to a different access corridor, or the use of a common balcony which leads to an escape route.
- Find out from your landlord if this is the case and make sure that it remains easy to use and does not become blocked by rubbish or anything else. Remember, you will not have time to clear your escape route when a fire happens.
- Talk through your 'escape plan' with everyone who lives in your home.
- Make sure everyone knows where to find door and window keys.



Top tip: Plan an escape route

MAKE A BEDTIME CHECK



BEDTIME CHECK

A lot of fires start at night. Do some checks before you go to bed:



Have access to a phone.

☐

Close all the inside doors.

☐

Closed doors slow down a fire.

☐

Un-plug things that use electricity.
But not things like fridges and freezers.

☐

Check the cooker is off.

☐

Do not leave the washer or dryer on at night.

☐

Turn off heaters unless essential.

☐

Put a fire-guard around the fire place.

☐

Check the doors to the outside are clear.

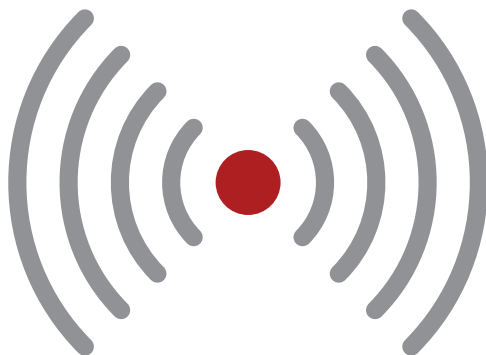
☐

Put keys where everyone can find them.

☐

Put candles and cigarettes out properly.

☐



SMOKE ALARMS SAVE LIVES

In the event of a fire – Get out. Stay out.
Call 999.

For advice specific to you and your home,
visit **www.ohfsc.co.uk** and complete
your own home fire safety check.



HEREFORD & WORCESTER
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FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE



PREVENTION

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