

# Safety in the Home

## Union Advice Centre

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**HOUSING ADVICE**

If you suspect a problem with gas or electricity in the home do not use any of the appliances or try to repair the problem yourself - contact your landlord as soon as possible.

If the landlord cannot deal with an urgent problem promptly:

- Electricity - contact an electrician (do not authorise any work as you may be expected to pay for it)
- Gas - contact the National Gas Emergency Service on 0800 111 999.

In the event of a fire call 999 for the Fire Brigade.

## **Electrical Safety Legislation**

Landlords are required to ensure the electrical installation and electrical appliances provided by them are in a safe condition. Home Run landlords are required to have an Electrical Periodic Inspection (PIR) carried out every two years and any damage or defects that are noted by the electrical assessor have to be rectified before the property is advertised.

Landlords can check their electrical appliances meet regulation by having a Portable Appliance Test carried out. It is also recommended that tenants have their own appliances (as opposed to those provided by the landlord) tested every couple of years.

Danger signs to look out for

- Hot plugs and sockets
- Fuses that blow for no obvious reason
- Lights flickering
- Brown scorch marks on sockets / plugs
- Sparks coming from switches
- Odd / badly worn or broken switches
- Frayed insulation
- A burning marzipan smell from overheating wiring
- Cracked or damaged areas on appliances
- Frayed, cut or damaged leads.

To prevent dangerous situations with electricity:

- Plugs and Powerpoints
  - Plugs should be correctly fused & power points not overloaded with adapters.
  - Always use a good quality adapter.
  - Never remove a plug by pulling the flex. Always hold the plug.
  - Always make sure your plugs and adapters have the right fuse for the appliance you are using. If in doubt, check with an approved electrician.
  - Use a 3 pin plug which conforms to the British Standard and carries the Kitemark.
- Portable Equipment
  - Some electrical appliances are designed to be plugged in / be on all the time. Check the manufacturers' instructions to make sure which appliances this refers to.
  - All other electrical appliances should be switched off & unplugged when not in use. Remove plugs carefully. Do not remove them by pulling the flex.
  - When buying new equipment look out for the BEAB Mark of Safety. This means that it has been tested and approved by the British Electrical Approvals Board.
  - Portable mains-operated electric appliances should not be taken into the bathroom.
  - Flexes & electrical equipment such as kettles & toasters should be kept well away from the cooker.

## **Gas Safety**

### **Legal requirements**

Landlords must ensure that all gas fittings / appliances serving residential premises they let to tenants are safe. Gas fittings / appliances include the pipe work which serves the premises if the landlord owns them or has control over them.

Landlords must arrange and pay for annual safety checks and for any necessary work to be carried out. Checks must be carried out by a person who is registered with the Gas Safe Register and only someone with the right knowledge and technical experience can carry out work on gas appliances.

You can check an installer and find out more information about Gas Safe Register at [www.gassaferegister.co.uk](http://www.gassaferegister.co.uk)

The landlord must keep a record of inspection dates, any defects identified and any remedial action taken for at least two years. Tenants have a legal right to request a copy of the safety check.

There are restrictions on the installation of gas appliances in sleeping accommodation which are not of the balanced flue type. All gas appliances in bathrooms, gas fires, gas heaters and water heaters of more than 14 kilowatts (kw) in bedrooms or bed-sitting rooms must also be sealed off from the room. Bedrooms with heating appliances of less than 14kw have to have a device which cuts off the gas supply before a dangerous level of carbon monoxide builds up.

Whenever renovations / improvement work are conducted in a room containing a gas appliance the appliance should subsequently be checked for safe operation.

**If you smell gas:**

- Never use a gas appliance if you think it is not working properly
- Call Transco's 24 hour freephone gas emergency service on 0800 111 999
- Do not smoke or strike matches
- Do not turn electrical switches on or off (including doorbells)
- Extinguish naked flames
- Keep people away from the affected area
- Open doors and windows to ventilate the property
- Turn off the gas meter at the control valve.

### **Danger signs to look out for:**

- Yellow or orange flames
- Signs of scorching on any part of the appliance
- Overheating and damage such as cracked radiants
- Stains or deposits of soot in the appliance
- Excessive condensation after you use the appliance
- A sooty or musty smell
- Smell of fumes or a sluggish fire when using solid fuel (or one which goes out altogether)
- Pilot lights which frequently blow out.

### **Never:**

- Cover an appliance or block the convection air vents
- Block or obstruct any fixed ventilation grilles or air bricks
- Cover or block outside flues.

### **Carbon Monoxide Poisoning**

Carbon monoxide is a poisonous gas produced when fuel does not burn properly. It has no colour, smell or taste. This makes it especially hazardous. It can kill in just hours. There is a particular risk if you sleep in a room where an appliance, which is not of the room-sealed type, is left burning at night.

If you think you have a problem with carbon monoxide turn off your appliance and report your concerns to your landlord who should call in an expert immediately. See your doctor if any adverse health effects are experienced.

### **Possible Sources:**

- Gas appliances and flues which have not been properly installed, checked or maintained
- Unqualified people installing or maintaining your appliance
- Faulty appliances
- Blocked chimneys or flues
- Paraffin heaters, portable bottled gas heaters, oil burning boilers
- Fumes leaking from a flue into an unventilated room.

**All fuel burning appliances require adequate ventilation.**

**Early symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning include:**

- Tiredness
- Drowsiness
- Headache
- Dizziness
- Muscular weakness
- Sickness
- Diarrhoea
- Chest and stomach pains
- Streaming eyes
- General lethargy
- Excessive exposure can lead to loss of consciousness, coma and death.

## **Fire Safety**

### **Legal requirements**

There are two pieces of legislation that relate to fire safety in rental accommodation. These are the Regulatory Reform Order (Fire Safety) 2005 and the Housing Health and Safety Rating System.

The fire precautions which are appropriate in a property will vary as they will depend on the circumstances at the property. The circumstances taken into account include for example:

- Number of residents.
- Number of floors.
- Arrangements for cooking.
- Layout and ease of escape in the event of fire.
- The presence of fire escape windows.
- Construction of the building and flammability of building elements.
- Safety of appliances and services such as gas and electricity.
- Whether part of the building is used commercially.

The majority of off-campus accommodation lived in by students are Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs). In general terms a HMO means accommodation where two or more households share amenities where a household includes: families, single people and couples.

It is not possible to have prescribed standards for Fire Safety. Each property is unique and therefore requires an individual risk assessment in order to establish what precautions need to be put in place. It is your landlord's responsibility to carry out this assessment and if required take action to modify the fire precautions accordingly.

### **Fire Safety Recommendations**

(Please note these recommendations are based on a typical student HMO. As above, specifics may vary. For more information please consult the Norwich City Council Fire Precautions in Dwellings document at <http://propertyinfopoint.co.uk>)

- Smoke Alarms
  - detectors should be in all circulation spaces that form part of the escape route in event of fire (typically this is in corridors and landings).
  - if there are no escape windows on the first floor, there should also be detectors in other rooms that pose a high fire risk (typically the kitchen).
  - should be wired in to the mains electricity and interlinked, so that if one alarm is triggered all alarms sound
  - should have a standby power supply, normally a battery backup
  - a responsible person should be allocated to test the system regularly. This can either be the landlord, or they can pass this responsibility on to the tenant. Your landlord should provide instructions on how to test the system and with what regularity.

- Fire Extinguishers
  - a wall mounted fire extinguisher is required in each room with cooking facilities
- Fire Blankets
  - a wall mounted fire blanket is required in each room with cooking facilities

The above should only be used if it is safe to do so and personal safety should always be put first. If in doubt evacuate and call 999.

To prevent dangerous situations with fire:

- Fires and Heaters:
  - All fires and heaters should be guarded, but especially open fires.
  - You should never leave newspapers, or clothes to dry, on the guard.
  - Portable heaters should always be kept away from furniture, fittings and furnishings and anywhere that objects may fall onto them.
  - Portable heaters should never be placed close to beds or used to dry clothes.
  - Make sure that the heaters cannot be knocked over.
  - Never sit too close to a heater in an attempt to keep warm.
- Cookers:
  - Keep electrical flexes away from the cooker.
  - Tea towels should never be dried over the cooker.
  - Ensure ovens are switched off after use.
  - A timer may help you remember you have left something cooking.
  - Never leave a saucepan unattended with the heat turned on.

- Chip Pan Safety:
  - Never fill a chip pan more than one third full of fat or oil.
  - Never leave a chip pan unattended when the heat is switched on.
  - Dry the chips before putting them in the pan.
  - Before you put the chips in the pan test the temperature of the oil by putting in a small piece of bread. If the bread crisps up quickly, the oil is ready.
  - Never put the chips in the pan if the oil begins to give off smoke. Turn off the heat and leave the oil to cool, otherwise it could catch fire.
- Routines:
  - Check all fire hot spots before going to bed.
  - You should have a plan of action should fire break out in your home. The fire safety risk assessment carried out by your landlord should detail routes of escape.
  - Always ensure fire doors are kept firmly closed and are never wedged open.
- Smokers:
  - Smokers should have plenty of deep ashtrays and should be aware of the great dangers of smoking in bed.
  - Never leave a lit cigarette unattended.

### **In the event of a fire:**

- Try not to panic.
- If it is safe to do so, close the door of the room where the fire has started and close all other doors behind you. This will delay the spread of fire and smoke.
- Before opening a closed door, use the back of your hand to touch it. Do not open the door if it feels warm.
- Get everyone out as quickly as possible.
- Do not try to pick up valuables or possessions.
- Make your way out as safely as possible.
- Plan your escape route in advance.
- Telephone the Fire Brigade on 999 from a mobile telephone, neighbour's house or the nearest 'phone box.
- Clearly state the address of the fire.

- Never go back into your home until a fire officer has told you it is safe to do so.

If a chip pan catches fire:

- Do not move it.
- Never lean over the pan to reach the cooker controls.
- **Never** throw water on it - this will make things **worse**.
- Turn off the heat if it is safe to do so.
- Cover the pan with a fire blanket to smother the flames.
- Leave to cool for at least 30 minutes.
- If you cannot control the fire yourself, leave the room, close the door and telephone the Fire Brigade.

If you are cut off by fire:

- Remain calm.
- Close the door nearest to the fire and use towels or sheets to block any gaps. This will help stop smoke from spreading into the room.
- Get to the window if the room becomes smoky. Go down to floor level - it is easier to breathe because the smoke will rise upwards.
- Open the window and try to attract attention of others who can alert the Fire Brigade.
- Wait for the Fire Brigade.
- If you are in immediate danger, drop cushions or bedding to the ground to break your fall from the window.
- Get out feet first and lower yourself to the full length of your arms before dropping.

### Useful Telephone Numbers

Emergency Services (Police, Ambulance and Fire Brigade)	999
National Gas Emergency Service	0800 111 999
Gas Safe Register	0800 408 5500
Gas Safety Advice Line (HSE)	0800 300 363
Norwich City Council (Environmental Health Dept)	01603 212212

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