



**Northern Ireland  
Fire & Rescue Service**

# **A PRACTICAL FIRE SAFETY GUIDE FOR SMALL SELF-CATERING PREMISES**

## **Information on Complying with Fire Safety Law in Northern Ireland**

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# VERSION CONTROL

This document is a dynamic document which will be amended when required to improve the content. The document is maintained by the Community Development Department, Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service Headquarters.

Amendments are detailed as below:

No	Issued	Amendment	Prepared by	Reason for change
1	23/03/2013	New guidance titled Small Bed & Breakfast and Self-Catering accommodation	GC O'Neill	Assist proprietors
2	25/08/2016	Separate Small Bed & Breakfast and Self-Catering Guide into two documents and update guidance	GC O'Neill	Following Building Control consultation

# 1 INTRODUCTION

This document provides guidance for proprietors of small self-catering premises who have duties under Part 3 of The Fire and Rescue Services (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 and The Fire Safety Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010. It is designed to help proprietors understand the steps that they should be taking to meet their legal obligations.

In general, The Fire and Rescue Services (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 and The Fire Safety Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010 seek to ensure the safety of persons (whether residents, visitors, employees or others), in the event of a fire, by setting out the responsibilities of persons with a duty under Articles 25 and 26 of the above Order. Anyone who has control to any extent of the premises will have some responsibilities for ensuring that those occupying the premises are safe from harm caused by fire.

It is acknowledged that relative to other 'sleeping risk' premises, the risk from fire to persons in well-managed small self-catering premises is likely to be relatively low.

The fire safety requirements are summarised in Table 1 at the end of this document.

There are likely to be alternative ways of demonstrating compliance with the relevant requirements other than by following a design provision given in this guide. There is therefore no obligation to adopt any particular provision, should you decide to comply in some other way. However, you will have to demonstrate that your alternative solution meets the relevant requirements by those other means.

## 2 WHO IS THIS GUIDANCE FOR?

The guidance is for proprietors of existing self-catering premises which:

- are offered as accommodation for self-catering holidays, to be occupied by not more than 10 persons;
- do not have letting accommodation below a ground floor or above a second floor;
- do not act as the principal residence for paying guests;
- do not have any storey area over 200m<sup>2</sup> internal floor space;
- have a means of escape from bedrooms via a traditional 'hall' with at least one exit directly to the outside. The guidance does not exclude a direct means of escape from bedrooms by way of a living/open planned area; however, it does outline additional considerations which must be taken into account where this is the case.

The guidance is not intended to cover private dwellings outside the scope of The Fire and Rescue Services (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 and The Fire Safety Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010, nor houses in multiple occupation (HMOs), small hotels, boarding houses and hostels.

This guide applies only to fire safety law. Additionally, Building Regulations apply to the construction of new premises or conversions, alterations or extensions to existing premises intended to be used for self-catering. If in doubt you should contact your local council building control department to see if an application is required and for further advice. Building legislation and guidance can be accessed at [www.buildingcontrol-ni.com](http://www.buildingcontrol-ni.com).

Self-catering premises outside the scope of this guide may require additional fire safety arrangements which are detailed in the HM Government Fire Risk Assessment Sleeping Accommodation Guide, available through the Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service (NIFRS) website [www.nifrs.org/firesafe](http://www.nifrs.org/firesafe).

### **3 WHAT DOES THE LAW REQUIRE?**

Fire safety law requires any person who has control of the premises to carry out an assessment to identify risks to the safety of persons in respect of harm caused by fire in the premises. It also requires them to take fire safety measures which are reasonable to ensure the safety of persons.

As the owner or operator you are likely to be the best person to know about the hazards on your own premises and how they can be controlled. You should therefore be able to carry out the fire safety risk assessment yourself.

Guidance on the steps you should take is provided in Annex A.

NIFRS will not carry out a fire safety risk assessment for you, but will be able to give you information and advice. We may also visit your premises, ask about your fire safety risk assessment and examine the fire safety measures. If we are not satisfied with the steps you have taken, we could take formal enforcement action. As an initial step, however, NIFRS will help you take appropriate measures to ensure the safety of your staff and guests.

### **4 BENCHMARKS FOR FIRE SAFETY**

The following benchmarks describe fire safety measures recommended to ensure the safety of occupants should a fire occur (Step 3 of your fire safety risk assessment). Before you consider these benchmarks, you will want to carry out your fire safety risk assessment and take any practical steps highlighted as a result to reduce or limit the risk of a fire starting. It is for you as the proprietor/responsible person to judge what practical steps to take in your individual circumstances.

These benchmarks are generally applicable to typical situations in a well-managed property for which it is not expected that a higher level of fire safety measures will be needed to meet your obligations under fire safety law. You may of course voluntarily decide to provide enhanced measures in excess of your legal obligations.

## 4.1 Fire Detection and Warning

The type of fire detection and warning system you require depends on the type of premises, the risk profile of the occupants and the number of floors in the premises.

There are different types of fire alarm system that will meet the fire safety standard expected in these types of property. These include:

- in newly registered self-catering premises and those that have yet to be advised by Building Control:
  - mains operated fire alarm with a battery back-up (all detectors interlinked);
- or in existing self-catering premises:
  - mains operated fire alarm with a battery back-up (all detectors interlinked);
  - a long-life (10-year) tamper-proof lithium battery operated fire alarm (all detectors interlinked).

Where long-life battery powered systems are used in existing self-catering premises, it is expected that they will be replaced with mains-powered alarms permanently wired to a circuit when the lifetime of the battery is ended or when material repair or redecoration work is being carried out to the property.

NIFRS first published fire safety guidance for small self-catering premises on 23 March 2013 and therefore from 23 March 2023, it is expected that all self-catering premises in Northern Ireland will be fitted with a mains operated fire alarm system with a battery back-up.

When the fire alarm is powered by mains electricity (and has an additional stand-by supply in the form of a battery), and where the fire alarm is powered by a long-life (10-year) tamper-proof lithium battery (all detectors interlinked), the following benchmarks should be considered:

### For premises up to three storeys

- one or more smoke alarms should be installed in the ground floor hall and at every landing level, sited so that no part of a hall or corridor is further than 7.5m from a smoke alarm and no bedroom door is further than 3m from a smoke alarm;
- a smoke alarm should also be installed in the principal habitable room<sup>1</sup><sup>2</sup> and in all rooms or areas that present a high fire risk<sup>3</sup> to occupants; and
- a heat alarm should be installed in the kitchen.

## 4.2 Fire Alarm General

The Fire Alarm System should be in accordance with BS 5839-6:2013 and be installed in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions.

Smoke alarms installed in halls and landings should be of the optical type<sup>4</sup> (although there is no need to replace existing non-optical alarms during their lifetime).

Alarms **should be capable of rousing sleeping occupants**, therefore, alarms **should be interlinked** so that actuation of one causes the actuation of the others. Interlinking of the alarms can be either by wiring or radio signal but the interlink must be in accordance with BS 5839-6:2004. Where the interlink is by means of a radio signal, the occupier will be expected to be able to demonstrate that a radio survey has been carried out as per BS 5839-6:2004.

You should establish a system that ensures the regular testing and maintenance of the alarms – this should ideally be a weekly test.

Where battery powered fire alarm systems are provided, it is expected that specific reference will be made to their testing and maintenance procedures in the fire risk assessment along with their suitability for the persons using the property.

## 4.3 Means of Escape via an Open Planned Area

Living/open planned areas are only permissible in self-catering premises comprising ground and first floor only. Means of escape through open planned areas for three storey premises is not permitted.

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<sup>1</sup> *Principal habitable room* - the room in a dwelling that is normally the most frequently used room for general daytime living purposes, eg, living room.

<sup>2</sup> If you permit smoking in the living room or dining rooms, or there are other possible sources of smoke in these rooms, eg, a toaster, you may wish to consider changing the type of alarm to a heat alarm to reduce likelihood of false alarms.

<sup>3</sup> A room with a high fire risk such as a boiler or portable heater.

<sup>4</sup> An optical smoke alarm is a conventional smoke alarm which utilises a light obscuration principle to detect smoke and is responsive to the type of smoke particles which could enter circulation areas during a fire.



Where the direct means of escape from first floor bedrooms is by way of a living/open planned area, consideration to a compensatory measure such as an emergency egress window will be required. Building Regulation guidance (from 1994) requires emergency egress windows at ground, first and second floor levels. Whilst the emergency egress windows at ground and first can be used for self-escape, emergency egress windows at second floor level are required to provide an opening where the occupants can be rescued from.

Emergency egress windows must meet all the guidance criteria in Technical Booklet E - Fire Safety to the Building Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012. In all houses built after 1994, the emergency egress window provision should already be in place and where a living/open planned area is provided; the foot of the stairway should not be more than 3m from a final exit or a door opening directly into a hallway (including a corridor leading to the hallway).

The premises' risk assessment must consider the ability of the occupiers to escape via an emergency egress window and should only be considered where the occupiers are able-bodied individuals with no specific high-risk characteristics and who can reasonably be expected to exit via the window unaided.

Where they are accepted, an emergency egress window from each habitable room would be the preferred solution with any exceptions to this rule considered on an individual risk assessment basis. An appropriate fire detection and warning system will always be required.

#### **4.4 Internal Doors**

A door between a room (other than a bathroom or toilet) and any corridor, hall or stair which would be the route out in the case of a fire need not be a fire door<sup>5 6</sup> but should be capable of holding back smoke and fire for sufficient time (a minimum of 20 minutes) to maximise the chances of the occupants escaping safely. An example of a suitable door type is a solid timber door.

Where the stairs are of sound construction and lead directly to a final exit without passing through a risk room, the following checklist will help you decide if you need to repair, adjust or replace any door:

- doors need to be capable of holding back smoke and fire for sufficient time to maximise the chances of occupants escaping safely;
- doors should be of a solid timber construction and fit well into their frames. Close-fitting doors of conventional construction (excluding light-weight doors and doors with very thin panels) are acceptable as nominal 20 minute fire-resistant doors up to two storeys (ground and first);

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<sup>5</sup> A fire door is a door assembly which is rated by its fire-resistance performance under test conditions.

<sup>6</sup> In two storey premises, where the principal habitable room or a room with a high fire risk is located on the ground floor and contains a heat detector, you should also consider providing smoke seals and intumescent strips to the room door if it opens onto an escape route.

- three storey premises require 20 minute fire-resistant doors; in practice, this may mean 30 minute fire-resistant doors being fitted.<sup>7</sup>
- hollow 'egg-box' type doors with a panelled finish are not acceptable as nominal 20 minute fire-resistant doors;
- doors should be close fitting to their frame with gaps of no more than 4mm;
- doors should have no sizeable splits, gaps or cracks and should not be warped;
- the glazing in doors, or onto escape routes, must be half-hour fire-resistant; and
- doors should be closed at night to inhibit the spread of smoke.

Doors will only be effective at holding back fire and smoke if the corridor or hall structure also has the ability to hold back fire. Therefore, the corridor and hall structure needs to be able to withstand the effects of fire for at least 20 minutes (30 minutes in three storey premises).

#### 4.5 Final Exit Doors

To facilitate escape from fire, the final exit door should only be secured with a lock or fastening which can be readily opened from the inside, **without the use of a key**, while the premises are occupied.

#### 4.6 Emergency Lighting

If a fire disrupts the normal lighting, there should still be sufficient illumination for occupants to find their way out of the property. Where an escape route does not receive adequate illumination from a street light or other external source, alternative emergency lighting should be provided.

Where emergency lighting is required, it will need to fulfil the following functions:

- indicate clearly and unambiguously the escape routes;
- provide illumination along such routes to allow safe movement towards and through the exits provided;
- ensure that (where it is provided) firefighting equipment can be readily located along the escape routes.

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<sup>7</sup> Three storey premises require 20 minute fire-resistant doors with self-closers where those doors form part of the enclosures to a protected stair (ie, three storey) in a single family dwelling house. Loft conversions to a two storey dwelling house to create a three storey dwelling house also have the option of using the existing 20 minute fire-resistant doors and fitting self-closers to them. In practice, this may mean 30 minute fire-resistant doors being fitted.

Emergency lighting could be provided through ensuring that the hall and landing (if applicable) have:

- one or more automatic plug-in night lights of a type which continue to operate if the mains electricity fails;
- rechargeable torches provided in all guest bedrooms, or
- self-contained luminaries installed complying with BS 5266-1:2011.

Where emergency lighting is provided, you should establish a testing and maintenance system which ensures that the emergency lighting provided is present and in working order. Records of the testing and maintenance programme for the emergency lighting should be kept.

#### **4.7 Firefighting Equipment**

A fire blanket should be provided in the kitchen for the operator to use. For additional protection you may wish to consider providing a multi-risk fire extinguisher in the hallway of the property.

#### **4.8 Emergency Fire Action Plan**

You should prepare a plan of what action the guests should take in the event of fire. This should include:

- clearly identifying the route of escape;
- how to raise the alarm;
- ensuring all guests are evacuated; and
- calling the Fire & Rescue Service.

You may also wish to give the guests further advice regarding the regular emptying of ashtrays (if smoking is permitted) and the use of their own portable electrical equipment when they arrive.

This should be available for each party arriving at the premises.

#### **4.9 Signage**

A simple notice advising the occupants of what to do in the event of a fire should be fixed in a prominent place such as the hall, and/or be provided within a welcome pack. Where rechargeable torches are provided to assist with evacuation, there should be a sign adjacent to each torch stating what it is to be used for.

**Exit signs are only required where they are needed.** In small premises, the escape route and the front door are likely to be obvious, so there may not be a need for an emergency exit sign. Less obvious or more complicated routes will require emergency exit directional signs.

#### **4.10 Soft Furnishing and Materials**

The fire rating of soft furnishing and materials, eg, settees, mattresses, bedding and curtains should comply with The Furniture and Furnishings (Fire)(Safety) Regulations 1988 as amended.

### **5 GUESTS WITH DISABILITIES**

You will need to consider the needs of guests with disabilities and plan accordingly. A free guide is available to assist entitled *Means of Escape for Disabled People*. This is available through the NIFRS website [www.nifrs.org/firesafe](http://www.nifrs.org/firesafe).

### **6 LOG BOOK**

A fire precautions log book must be maintained to record the testing and maintenance of:

- the automatic fire alarm;
- any provision for emergency lighting;
- any first aid firefighting equipment; and
- any fire drills.

### **7 IF YOU DISAGREE WITH ADVICE PROVIDED BY NIFRS**

It is the responsibility of NIFRS to decide how it will deploy its resources to address risk to life to improve the safety of the community. NIFRS may or may not contact you to discuss your fire safety risk assessment. You are, however, free to contact them for advice.

This guidance is issued by NIFRS to assist owners and responsible persons comply with the legislation. Should you disagree with any advice given to you by NIFRS, you can:

- discuss this further with us to work towards an acceptable action plan in an agreed timescale. If you are not satisfied with the advice provided details of our complaints procedure is available at [www.nifrs.org](http://www.nifrs.org).
- in the case of a formal enforcement notice, lodge an appeal with the court. In this case you may wish to get legal advice.

### **8 SOURCES OF FURTHER INFORMATION**

For further information, visit the NIFRS website [www.nifrs.org/firesafe](http://www.nifrs.org/firesafe). Here you will find general guidance plus the relevant sector specific guidance for premises within the scope of this guidance.

## **ANNEX A - HOW TO CARRY OUT A FIRE SAFETY RISK ASSESSMENT**

The steps below are intended to help you through the process of carrying out an assessment of the fire risks in your property.

### **Step 1: Who is at risk?**

Consider the numbers and capability of people who may occupy your property and who could be at risk. This includes guests, owners, any other visitors including cleaners, tradespersons, etc. Make a note if particularly vulnerable persons are likely such as children, elderly, or disabled persons (you will need to consider the fire safety of guests with any special needs or vulnerabilities).

### **Step 2: What fire hazards are there?**

Think about how a fire could start on your premises and identify sources of ignition such as cooking, heaters, open fires and smoking. Do family members smoke? Are there designated bedrooms where guests are permitted to smoke? Where are electrical appliances such as tumble dryers and TVs? What is the likelihood of a deliberate fire?

Consider what could burn and act as fuel for a fire. This could include furniture, bedding, laundry, wood/kindling for open fires, rubbish, flammable liquids, solvents, chemicals or gases, cooking oil, paint, white spirit, cleaning products, aerosols, LPG, or fuels such as petrol.

Consider what could happen if a fire occurred and how quickly it could spread. The construction of the property can affect how fire can spread; it may spread faster if there are multiple layers of wallpaper, polystyrene ceiling tiles or interior wood panelling. If rubbish stored outside caught fire, could it spread to inside the property or block an exit door?

### **Step 3: What can you do to reduce/remove risk and what fire safety measures should be put in place?**

Now that you have considered the people at risk and the hazards, you can take steps as necessary to reduce the risk both of a fire occurring and of injury or loss of life should a fire occur. You may also wish to consider the risk of damage to your property, and any subsequent loss of business.

If ignition sources and fuel sources are reduced, and these are kept apart, the chances of a fire starting are low. The following lists some of the actions that are advised for dwellings as part of normal community fire safety which you should consider to reduce the risk of a fire occurring:

- ensure good housekeeping, so that storage is in designated areas only and is orderly; ensure refuse and packaging is disposed of frequently and carefully; and ensure that bins are secure;
- ensure flammable materials and liquids are stored properly, away from ignition sources and from the electrical fuse box and meter, boilers, etc. Do not store aerosols in damp areas (such as under sinks);
- avoid the use of portable gas heaters; use only in an emergency when only butane should be used;
- ensure that electrical and gas appliances and equipment are maintained, serviced and kept in good working order. Clean extract equipment to kitchens regularly;
- replace any chip pans with a thermostatically controlled deep fat fryer;
- individual heating appliances should be fixed in position and guarded;
- ensure the electrical installation to the property is in good order; get it checked if in any doubt. Ensure correct wiring of plugs and correct fuse ratings;
- if anyone smokes, ensure ashtrays are provided, emptied regularly and safely. Inspect or advise your guests to inspect smoking areas before bedtime;
- keep halls, corridors and stairs, which would be used to escape from a fire, clear and hazard free and advise guests to do this also. In particular, keep the passageways clear of items which can burn, or are a source of ignition such as electrical equipment, coat racks, refuse, laundry, upholstered furniture, portable heaters or gas cylinders;
- if your property is in an area where vandalism or deliberate fires are a problem, consider security measures to prevent entrance to the grounds of the property and access to refuse storage and storage of any flammable liquids/gases.

You should then consider what further safety measures are necessary to reduce the risk of injury or loss of life should a fire occur in your premises, for example:

- means for detecting and effectively warning occupants of a fire which occurs in any part of the premises;
- means to restrict the spread of fire and smoke from the source to other areas especially the escape route;
- means of escape which are easy to use at any time by persons who are not familiar with the premises, for example guests who have recently arrived;
- means for fighting a small fire such as a fire in a waste bin or in a cooking pan.

Guidance on what is expected in these areas is provided in Section 4 - Benchmarks for Fire Safety.

#### **Step 4: Record**

It is a good idea to keep a written record of your fire safety risk assessment. This will make it easier for you to review your assessment and it will also be easier to demonstrate that you have carried out an assessment. You should also record the arrangements for reviewing your fire safety risk assessment, your emergency fire action plan and the maintenance arrangements for fire safety measures.

#### **Step 5: Review**

You need to regularly review your fire safety risk assessment. Is there anything that has altered the risk and means you need to consider again the fire safety measures you have in place? For example, are you doing building work, maintenance or decorative work? Do you have a different range of guests such as more elderly or disabled?

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

The Fire and Rescue Services (Northern Ireland) Order 2006.

The Fire Safety Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010.

DHSSPS Fire Safety Risk Assessment - Sleeping Accommodation.

DHSSPS Fire Safety Law - The Evacuation of Disabled People from Buildings.

BS 5839-6:2013 - Fire Detection and Fire Alarm Systems for Buildings.

The Furniture and Furnishings (Fire) (Safety) Regulations 1988 as amended.



**TABLE 1 - SUMMARY OF FIRE SAFETY REQUIREMENTS**

	Self-Catering up to three storeys with sleeping on any floor		Notes
Capacity	Maximum 10 guests including children		
Size	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maximum three storeys (ground, first and second)</li> <li>• No basements</li> <li>• Maximum 200m<sup>2</sup> per floor</li> </ul>		
Fire Alarm  Mains operated battery back-up (interlinked)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One or more smoke alarms installed in the ground floor hall and on every landing level</li> <li>• Smoke alarm installed in main habitable room</li> <li>• Smoke alarm in any high risk rooms</li> <li>• Heat alarm in kitchen</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Detectors to meet BS 5839-6: 2013 standard</li> <li>• Alarms should be able to rouse sleeping occupants</li> <li>• Long-life battery systems should be replaced by mains powered permanently wired systems when the lifetime of the battery is ended or when material repair or redecoration work is being carried out to the property</li> <li>• Any upgrade to the premises is to meet current Building Control standards</li> </ul>
Fire Alarm  Long-life (10 year) tamper proof battery operated (interlinked)  (Only in existing premises)			
Emergency Lighting	Alternative or borrowed lighting that indicates clearly and unambiguously the escape routes		
Doors	Solid Door 20 minutes resistance (premises consisting of ground and first floor only)	Solid Door 30 minutes resistance (required at all levels in a three storey property)	Hall and corridors should also offer 30 minutes resistance
Firefighting Equipment	<b>Kitchen</b> - fire blanket <b>Hallway</b> – 1 x Multi-Risk Fire Extinguisher (premises consisting of ground and first floor only)	<b>Kitchen</b> - fire blanket <b>Hallway &amp; second floor</b> – 1 x Multi-Risk Fire Extinguisher (three storey property)	
Exit Lock Doors	EOD on exit lock door (including any vestibule doors) whilst premises are occupied		Final exit door opened from inside without need for a key