

Guide to fire safety requirements in HMOs

This guidance relates to licensable properties with more than 5 people, as well as small HMOs where 3 or 4 people are sharing a kitchen or bathroom. It provides a summary of the fire safety requirements for certain HMOs.

The guidance should be read in conjunction with LACORS 'Housing – Fire Safety- Guidance on fire safety provisions for certain types of existing housing.

http://www.cieh.org/library/Knowledge/Housing/National_fire_safety_guidance_08.pdf

The Housing Act 2004 is our principal piece of legislation for regulating HMOs, and HHSRS is used to assess and regulate fire safety standards. See the HHSRS Operating Guidance and HHSRS Enforcement Guidance.

The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 provides duties in relation to fire safety in the common areas of HMO's (this does not include HMOs occupied as shared houses). The responsible person is required to carry out a fire risk assessment. This is enforced by Cleveland Fire Brigade. Guidance for the fire and rescue authorities can be found in HM Government Fire Safety Risk Assessment Sleeping Accommodation Guide.

This guidance only relates to HMO categories A & B, for further categories of HMO and for self-contained accommodation refer directly to LACORS.

Categories of Houses in Multiple Occupation

- A. **Bedsit Accommodation** – non-self-contained units. There will be some sharing of facilities. Each let has its own tenancy agreement, and usually a lock on the door.
- B. **Shared House/Flat** – occupied by members of a defined group eg. Students. There is likely to be a single joint tenancy agreement, and social interaction between the tenants. There must be a communal living room provided.
- C. **Household with lodgers** – resident landlord
- D. **Hostels and B&B Establishments** – often used a temporary accommodation for homeless.

Protected Escape Routes

A protected escape route is a route to remain free from smoke or fire for a time to allow occupiers to pass along it to a place of safety. This will typically be the staircase, landings and hallway of the house leading to the final exit. A 30-minute protected route will be enclosed with construction giving 30 minutes of fire resistance and containing 30-minute fire-resisting doors.

Layout should be considered, ideally sleeping areas should be closer to the exit door than living areas or kitchen facilities.

Fire risks such as storage of flammable materials should be removed.

Brickwork and timber stud walls with plasterboard each side are acceptable. The understairs cupboards need to be constructed and underdrawn to provide 30 minute fire resistance.

Fire Doors (FD30S) or (FD60S)

Requirement for fire doors:

- Smoke and fire resistant for 30 mins or 60 mins.
- 3 hinges per door
- No mortice locks, thumb-turn locks are required to exit.
- Surface mounted Self-closing device (not required in low risk shared house)
- Intumescent strip is a strip of material fitted around the edges of a fire door which swells to several times its original volume when subjected to heat. This fills the gap between the door and frame during a fire.
- Smoke seal is strip fitted around the edge of a fire door to restrict the passage of smoke between the door and the frame. (S in FD30S denotes smoke seal)
- The fire door should be tight fitting in the frame and free from disrepair.

Smoke Detection and Alarms

Graded A to F for type of system.

A - Interlinked smoke and heat detectors which are linked to a control panel. The system should include manual call points. The alarm signal must achieve sound levels of not less than 65 dB(A) in all accessible parts of the building, and not less than 75 dB(A) at all bedheads when all the doors are shut.

D - one or more mains powered alarms with integral battery backup. No control panel.

F = battery powered smoke alarms, not recommended for HMOs

BS5839: part 1 section 6 contains recommendations for regular, routine testing.

Coverage of areas in a property

LD1 – everywhere is covered, including common areas and any place that a fire might start

LD2 – common areas and rooms presenting a high fire risk such as kitchen and shared living room

LD3 – escape route only

Emergency lighting

Not required for 2 storey properties, however, may be needed for 3 or 4 storey properties, where there is no street lighting or if there are long or complex escape routes. Emergency lighting is required for 5 or more stories.

Inner rooms and escape Windows

A room where the only escape is through another room is termed an inner room, this should be avoided but can be accepted if the inner room is a kitchen or bathroom.

If the inner room is a living room, sleeping room or study it can only be accepted if the room,

- has access onto an alternative safe route of escape or has an escape window.
- has an adequate automatic fire detection and warning system in place.
- has a fire door fitted between the inner and outer rooms.

Should the outer room be an area of high risk, an escape window should be provided.

Escape windows are acceptable for ground and first floors, not for 3 or more storey properties (floor level should be no more than 4.5M from the ground).

An escape window should have a total unobstructed opening that is at least 0.33 M². With a minimum window height of 450mm and width of 450mm. The Maximum sill height should be 1.1M above the floor.

Category A - Bedsit-type HMO of no more than two storeys

Escape routes

30-minute protected route is required, including 30-minute fire-resisting construction. Travel distance must not be excessive.

FD30S doors to all risk rooms and rooms leading to staircase enclosure or hallway (not bathrooms/WCs), doors to be fitted with surface mounted self-closers, intumescent strips, and smoke seals.

The understairs cupboard to have 30-minute fire resistant walls, ceiling and lining, door and frame including intumescent strips. The door should be kept locked when not in use.

Locks fitted to doors must be openable by the occupiers from the inside without a key (thumb-turn)

Fire separation

No requirement for additional fire-resisting separation between units, but walls and floors should be of sound, traditional construction.

Fire detection and alarm system

Mixed system

Grade D, LD2 system

- Interlinked mains wired smoke alarms with integral battery back-up located throughout the escape route

Where cooking facilities are sited within the bedsits:

- Interlinked heat alarms with integral battery back-up located in each bedsit, and
- Additional non-interlinked smoke alarm with integral battery back-up located in each bedsit.

Where cooking facilities are sited in shared kitchen, not within bedsits:

- Interlinked smoke alarms with integral battery back-up located in each bedsit,
- Interlinked heat alarms with integral battery back-up located in each communal kitchen, and
- Additional interlinked smoke alarms with integral battery back-up located in any cellar.

Lighting of escape routes

Emergency escape lighting required only if the route is long or complex or where there is no effective borrowed light. Conventional artificial lighting required.

Fire fighting equipment

Fire blanket to be provided in each bedsit with cooking facilities and in shared kitchens.

Fire safety signs

Signage along escape route if the escape route is complex.

Category A - Bedsit-type HMO of three or four storeys

Escape routes

30-minute protected route is required, including 30-minute fire-resisting construction. Travel distance must not be excessive.

FD30S doors to all risk rooms and rooms leading to staircase enclosure or hallway (not bathrooms/WCs), doors to be fitted with surface mounted self-closers, intumescent strips, and smoke seals.

The understairs cupboard to have 30-minute fire resistant walls, ceiling and lining, door and frame including intumescent strips. The door should be kept locked when not in use.

Locks fitted to doors must be openable by the occupiers from the inside without a key (thumb-turn)

Fire separation

No requirement for additional fire-resisting separation between units, but walls and floors should be of sound, traditional construction.

Fire detection and alarm system

Mixed system

Grade A, LD2 system

- Smoke detectors located throughout the escape route.

Where cooking facilities are sited within the bedsits:

- Interlinked heat detectors located in each bedsit; and
- Additional Grade D, non-interlinked smoke alarm with integral battery back-up located in each bedsit.

Where cooking facilities are sited in shared kitchen, not within bedsits:

- Interlinked smoke detectors located in each bedsit
- Heat detectors located in each kitchen; and
- Additional interlinked smoke detectors located in any cellar.

Lighting of escape routes

Conventional lighting is required. Emergency escape lighting maybe appropriate if route complex or there is no effective borrowed light.

Fire fighting equipment

Fire blanket to be provided in each bedsit with cooking facilities and in shared kitchens.

Fire safety signs

Final exit sign and signage along the escape route if the escape route is complex.

Category A - Bedsit-type HMO of five or six storeys

Escape routes

30-minute protected route is required, including 30-minute fire-resisting construction. Travel distance must not be excessive.

FD30S doors to all risk rooms and rooms leading to staircase enclosure or hallway (not bathrooms/WCs), doors to be fitted with surface mounted self-closers, intumescent strips, and smoke seals.

The understairs cupboard to have 30-minute fire resistant walls, ceiling and lining, door and frame including intumescent strips. The door should be kept locked when not in use.

Locks fitted to doors must be openable by the occupiers from the inside without a key (thumb-turn)

- Five storeys - Lobby protection to all floors except the top floor or secondary means of escape from top floor
- Six storeys - Lobby protection to all floors except the top floor and secondary means of escape from top two floors

Fire separation

30-minute fire separation between units of accommodation throughout 30-minute fire separation across the stairway between second and third floors and between fourth and fifth floors

Fire detection and alarm system

Mixed system

Grade A, LD2 system

- smoke detectors located throughout the escape route

Where cooking facilities are sited within the bedsits:

- heat detectors located in each bedsit;
- additional Grade D, non-interlinked smoke alarm; with integral battery back-up located in each bedsit.

Where cooking facilities are sited in shared kitchen, not within bedsits:

- smoke detectors located in each bedsit;
- heat detectors located in each kitchen; and
- additional interlinked smoke detectors located in any cellar.

Lighting of escape routes

Emergency escape lighting required, and conventional artificial lighting required.

Fire fighting equipment

Fire blanket to be provided in each bedsit with cooking facilities and in shared kitchens.

Fire safety signs

Final exit sign and directional signage along escape route

Category B - Shared house of no more than two storeys

Escape routes

No requirement for full 30-minute protected route, but the escape route should have sound, traditional construction and should not pass through risk rooms. Where construction standards are poor, travel distances are long or other higher risk factors are present, a 30-minute protected route may be required.

No requirement for fire doors, but sound, well-constructed and close-fitting conventional doors are required.

Fire separation

No requirement for additional fire resistance, but walls and floors should be of sound, traditional construction.

Fire detection and alarm system

Grade D, LD3 system:

- Interlinked mains wired smoke alarms with integral battery back-up located in the escape route at all floor levels;
- Additional interlinked heat alarm with battery back-up located in the kitchen;
- Additional interlinked smoke alarm with integral battery back-up located in the lounge; and
- Additional interlinked smoke alarms with integral battery back-up located in any cellar.

Lighting of escape routes

No requirement for emergency escape lighting, but conventional artificial lighting is required.

Fire fighting equipment

Fire blanket to be provided in the kitchen

Fire safety signs

No requirement

Category B - Shared house of three or four storeys

Escape routes

30-minute protected route is required, including 30-minute fire-resisting construction. Travel distance must not be excessive.

FD30S doors to all risk rooms and rooms leading to staircase enclosure or hallway (not bathrooms/WCs), doors to be fitted with surface mounted self-closers, intumescent strips, and smoke seals.

The understairs cupboard to have 30-minute fire resistant walls, ceiling and lining, door and frame including intumescent strips. The door should be kept locked when not in use.

Locks fitted to doors must be openable by the occupiers from the inside without a key (thumb-turn)

Fire separation

No requirement for additional fire resistance, but walls and floors should be of sound, traditional construction.

Fire detection and alarm system

Grade D, LD3 system:

- Interlinked mains wired smoke alarms with integral battery back-up located in the escape route at all floor levels;
- Additional interlinked heat alarm with battery back-up located in the kitchen;
- Additional interlinked smoke alarm with integral battery back-up located in the lounge; and
- Additional interlinked smoke alarms with integral battery back-up located in any cellar.

Lighting of escape routes

Emergency escape lighting required only if the route is long or complex or where there is no effective borrowed light. Conventional artificial lighting required.

Fire fighting equipment

Fire blanket to be provided in the kitchen

Fire safety signs

Signage only required if the escape route is complex

Category B - Shared house of five or six storeys

Escape routes

30-minute protected route is required, including 30-minute fire-resisting construction. Travel distance must not be excessive.

FD30S doors to all risk rooms and rooms leading to staircase enclosure or hallway (not bathrooms/WCs), doors to be fitted with surface mounted self-closers, intumescent strips, and smoke seals.

The understairs cupboard to have 30-minute fire resistant walls, ceiling and lining, door and frame including intumescent strips. The door should be kept locked when not in use.

Locks fitted to doors must be openable by the occupiers from the inside without a key (thumb-turn)

- Five storeys - Lobby protection to all floors except the top floor or secondary means of escape from top floor
- Six storeys - Lobby protection to all floors except the top floor and secondary means of escape from top two floors

Fire separation

No requirement for additional fire resistance generally, but walls and floors should be of sound, traditional construction. Lateral fire-resisting separation of the top floor (in five storey) or top two floors (in six storey) from the remainder of the house is required. If a cellar is present, provide 30-minute separation between the cellar and the ground floor escape route.

Fire detection and alarm system

Grade A, LD2 system

- Detection throughout escape route and all risk rooms including living rooms, kitchen (heat detection) and any cellar.

Lighting of escape routes

Emergency escape lighting required, and conventional artificial lighting required

Fire fighting equipment

Fire blanket to be provided in the kitchen

Fire safety signs

Signage only required if the escape route is complex or where there is a secondary means of escape