



Safety and Communal Living

Guidance for Leaseholders

Contents

Please find below some guidance we'd like to share with you to reduce common problems we find reported by flat owners. If you've got any additions to this list, we'd love to hear them.

PAGE 3: Internal Leaks

PAGE 4: Electrical Safety

PAGE 5: Fire Safety

PAGE 7: Rubbish
Communal Area Safety

PAGE 8: Ebikes
Noise Nuisance in Flats

PAGE 9: Reporting Problems
How to Reach Us
What to do in an Emergency
Subletting

Introduction

Thank you for taking the time to read our Safety in Flats guide. This is a general document that's been written for all people who own a flat and the terminology we use has been generalised. For instance, we will call people/legal entities that own a flat a "flat owner" but you may be a leaseholder, joint freeholder or some other legal structure.

We refer to entities that own and are responsible for the communal area, an RP which stands for Responsible Person. This may be the freeholder but, if there is a residents management company or Right To Manage Company, it will be that entity.

If you are in doubt about your specific block please ask us. Our team members are always happy to answer your questions or offer professional advice.



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Internal Leaks

Please check your property regularly for signs of leaks either from your installations or into your flat. Shower screens are advised for any in-bath showers to reduce splashing. Toilets with concealed cisterns should be opened regularly and inspected for leaks.

Things to look out for are sponginess in the bathroom floor, damp smells in the room, defective silicone. The insurance excess is payable by the leaseholder responsible for the leak. If you have not reported a leak in a timely fashion, you may be responsible for the excess damage. Insurers are tightening up on these liability issues.

Electrical Safety

The block owner/freeholder or Right to Manage company is only responsible for fire safety in the communal area. Flat owners and tenants both have responsibilities for the situation inside the flat.

Here are some things to consider:

WIRING

As a flat owner, you have a responsibility to ensure the inside of your flat is safe, not just for you but also other people living in your block. You are responsible for repairs inside your flat and that includes internal wiring. Everyone could be affected if wiring you have not maintained causes a fire. Landlords are now legally obliged to have an EICR (electrical installation condition report) every five years. Homeowners should consider having their own wiring checked regularly too.



PORTABLE APPLIANCES

The fire at Grenfell Tower was started by a faulty fridge. Have you ever had your portable appliances tested to ensure they are safe? If you use a fridge, washing machine, microwave etc or have any plugged in wall heaters in your flat, consider having them checked annually. This is called a PAT test and whilst not a legal requirement we feel everyone in living in flats should PAT test their appliances.

Visit: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/electrical-safety-standards-in-the-private-rented-sector-guidance-for-landlords-tenants-and-local-authorities/guide-for-landlords-electrical-safety-standards-in-the-private-rented-sector>

Fire Safety

SMOKE ALARMS

Smoke alarms are a legal requirement in communal areas and will be maintained by your RP. However, as a flat owner, it is usually your responsible for providing adequate fire detection in your own leasehold property. Smoke alarms can be purchased from most DIY stores and are easy to install. However, in more modern buildings it might be necessary for your smoke alarm to be linked to the mains electricity or even the mains system. Please check with us if you are unsure. You should frequently check battery operated detectors are in good working order. Many will emit a slow beep if batteries need changing. You should also run a routine battery test regularly.



BALCONIES

All landlords and occupants with balconies need to be aware of appropriate use regulations. This is of particular importance during warm summer months. In most leases, it will note whether the balcony forms part of the apartment or is a demised area of the apartment. Landlords are responsible for the behaviour of occupants and ensuring they adhere to the terms of the apartment lease. In the majority of circumstances, leases dictate there should be no BBQs and combustible items being used or stored on balconies or terraces.

FIRE SAFE DOORS

If the door of your flat leads onto an enclosed communal area (i.e. a hallway shared with other flats) then it is considered a fire door and needs to be fire safe. It is your responsibility as a flat owner to ensure your front door is of a suitable fire safety standard. This is because the communal area is usually the way that everyone exits the building in a fire. If there is a fire in your flat, you should exit, close the door and phone 999. The smoke will then stay in the flat long enough for the fire to be put out or your neighbours to also evacuate. In very small blocks, you should also let your neighbours know there is a fire.

- UPVC doors are never fire safe.
- Door furniture (hinges etc) should be fire safe (it should say that on them)
- Gaps between the door and frame, and around the frame should be less than 4mm (except potentially at the bottom of the door, where the gap should be as small as practicable allowing for uneven floors).
- There should be an overhead self-closer.
- Most doors will have intumescent strips and smoke seals too. These are strips that go around the edge of the door and melt to cause a seal in a fire. They shouldn't have any gaps in, should stick out evenly and be generally in good condition.

Please follow these instructions for all fire doors whether it is inside your property or in communal areas.

- Fire doors should be kept shut when not in use
- Do not remove or obstruct the self-closing devices (If you find a fire door in a communal area too heavy/stiff/fast please tell us and we will have them adjusted)

WHAT TO DO IN THE EVENT OF A FIRE

There should be a sign in your communal area telling you what to do in the event of a fire. Please read it and follow the instructions. If there is conflicting information or no signage, please let us know urgently.

In the event of a fire in your own flat, you should phone 999 and leave the property closing all doors and windows behind you.

It is important to keep communal areas completely clear of belongings to ensure they remain fire safe areas. We know this can be inconvenient, but making sure you and your neighbours can get out safely in a fire is important.



Rubbish

HOW TO DISPOSE OF BULK RUBBISH

Please do not place bulk rubbish in the communal bin areas. The council will not simply clear bulk waste from flats. You should phone your local council who will arrange a collection. If we have to clear it on your behalf, you will still have to pay the charge. It will also be more expensive as we will use a commercial contractor and you will also be liable for our reasonable administration fees for dealing with it.

Communal Area Safety

Please do not store anything in the communal areas of flats.

These are fire safe areas. If there is a fire and it is dark and smoky, you or a neighbour might not be able to get passed an object such as a bike or a pram. It is particularly dangerous to put items that may catch fire in communal areas such as old fridges, paint or motorbikes but that's not to say non-flammable items are acceptable. Communal areas must be kept clear.

Please see separate section on ebikes



Be safe and considerate
– keep items
such as a bike
in your room if
necessary

Please do not let people into the building you don't know.

If there is a buzzer system, and a tradesperson rings your bell and you are not expecting someone, do not let them in. The person who they are coming to see should let them in. Don't allow people you don't know to tailgate you into the building. If people are up to no good, getting through the communal door makes it much easier for them to break into a flat.

IF YOU SEE A SUSPICIOUS PERSON IN THE BUILDING PHONE THE POLICE.

Ebikes

We have seen an increased number of Ebikes being used in and around Southend.

CHARGING YOUR E-BIKE

The majority of fires related to e-bikes have happened in homes. These fires are often caused when charging batteries. Please pay special attention to bike conversion kits. Do not attempt to modify or tamper with the battery. Always follow the manufacturer's instructions.

REDUCE THE RISK OF OVERHEATING

- Batteries can get warm during their use. Allow them to cool down before attempting to re-charge.
- Batteries should always be charged on hard flat surfaces where heat can dissipate.
- Batteries can also pose a risk if they have been damaged, so try to ensure they are not getting knocked around while in use or while being carried.
- Batteries should never be exposed to extremes of temperature.

FOLLOW THE INSTRUCTIONS

- Always follow manufacturers' instructions when charging
- Never leave it charging unattended or charge it while you are asleep.
- You should always make sure you unplug your charger once it's finished charging.
- Always use the correct charger for your batteries and buy any replacements from a reputable seller.

Please consider your own safety and that of others if you own and need to store an Ebike. Whilst we have already explained any sort of bike should be kept out of communal areas, if possible, Ebikes should be stored out of flats too. An outside, secure bicycle store would be the safest option.

Noise Nuisance in Flats

If you have a problem with noise from your neighbour, your first step is usually to talk to them to try and resolve the situation amicably. If there is a serious issue, you should immediately call the police. Please also notify us but we have limited powers. For instance, if a tenant is making noise, the landlord of that flat, or sometimes the RP, will take action. Legal action is a slow, expensive procedure and a last resort. They may not do it willingly either.

You should also report it to the council, visit:

<https://www.southend.gov.uk/pollution-0/noise-pollution>

We won't be able to take legal action without evidence such as police reference numbers or complaints logs. The council can help you with this.

Reporting Problems

We visit properties we manage every 6 to 12 months but we need your help keeping an eye on issues and reporting new problems as they arise.

If you are sub-letting your property and would like a copy of our safety information for tenants, please contact us and we will be happy to send you a copy you can forward on.

HOW TO REACH US?

Email us at bm@pace-properties.com or telephone 01702 445 600.

WHAT TO DO IN AN EMERGENCY

Please don't simply email urgent matters – we can't see every email as it comes in.

If something happens out of hours and needs emergency attention such as a leak or serious damage to a communal door please check our website for information on what to do next:

<https://www.pace-properties.com/support-for-tenants-leaseholders-and-residents/>

If you can't get online, please telephone 01702 445 600 and listen to the out of hours message which has abbreviated instructions. During the day, please call the office. If it's a non-urgent matter, please send us an email and the appropriate person will get back to you as soon as they can.

LEASEHOLDER PORTAL

We have a leaseholder portal where you can access your service charge documents at any time. This information is available on the portal here:

<https://www.myblockonline.co.uk/rel3/BlockLogin>.

If you have yet to set up an account, please let us know and we will forward you a login. You can also use the portal to notify us of any maintenance issues by raising a ticket from the "report a problem" area. Please do not report urgent matters in this way. If something is urgent, please telephone us or refer to the Out of Hours section on the website. <https://www.pace-properties.com/support-for-tenants-leaseholders-and-residents/#:~:text=Out%2Dof%2Dhours%20emergency%20procedures%3A&text=You%20should%20make%20the%20property,Lock%20Father%2C%2008000%20113%20933>

Subletting

Most leases state that flats cannot be let on a short term basis or to multiple tenants. It is unlikely that you can let on AirBnB for instance. Please contact us to check if you are considering this. If you do this without permission, you may face legal action for breach of your lease, be unable to continue with the bookings and be liable for expensive legal costs.

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