

Fire safety information pack for residents



**33-122, Gainsborough Tower,
Academy Gardens, Northolt,
London**

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Introduction

This resident fire safety information pack contains some extremely valuable information about the fire safety measures found in both in your block and your home. We encourage you to take time to read it all – if the worst happened, it could save your life.

We have also provided information on measures that you can adopt to ensure that you, your family and your neighbours are kept safe and secure, and that you are aware of what you need to do in the event of a fire in the building.

The information on fire safety measures found in your home includes the fire alarm/detection systems, fire doors and escape routes. We explain some of the hazards found in the home and tips on how you can reduce the risk of a fire breaking out.

You will also find information about the equipment and construction materials that exist to ensure that if a fire does break out, it is contained in the area where it started. If you need to evacuate the building, we have provided detailed instructions of your escape route(s) in both graphic and text formats.

Fire safety is something we all need to take very seriously. We have added examples of hazardous practices that could hamper both residents who need to escape and emergency services trying to fight a fire and carrying out rescues. We all have a responsibility to ensure the building is safe.

If you need any further information about fire safety, we have included a number of contacts who can help. You can find those on page 17.

Ealing Council has appointed a contractor to carry out fire risk assessments (FRAs). This assessment process involves auditing buildings and recording any fire safety deficiencies in a document form. The form is detailed, so a list of issues does not necessarily mean the building is unsafe. The FRAs cover the common areas of the buildings only and not inside the flats. To determine the level of protection between the homes, Ealing Council has a programme of surveys that will check to ensure you are safe if any of your neighbours are unfortunate enough to have a fire.

A fire risk assessment is carried out as often as required depending on the level of risk. This is a legal document and where necessary will be updated to reflect any major issues that may crop up before a new assessment is due.

The council's fire safety team also advise, assist and train Ealing staff, work closely with contractors on refurbishments/new builds and offer advice to our residents where we can.

We also work closely with the London Fire Brigade to ensure that the standards we set are the same high standards that they, as the enforcing authority, expect of housing providers.

What to do in an emergency

If there is a fire in your home

- Do not stay to fight the fire. Evacuate everyone from the flat immediately, alerting your neighbours by shouting “fire, fire”.
- Make sure you close all doors behind you. If the door of the room which is burning is open, close the door if it is safe to do so.
- Leave the building by the most direct route that does not expose you to fire or smoke. Do not use the lift.
- Once you have got to a safe place away from the building where you will not be affected by smoke, flames, or debris from a developing fire, and where you will not obstruct other evacuees, call the fire brigade by dialling 999. Keep calm and follow the operator’s instructions.
- When the fire brigade arrive, identify yourself as a resident and cooperate with their instructions.

If there is a fire in another part of the building

- Stay put in your flat unless evacuated by the fire brigade. In nearly all cases where there is a fire elsewhere in your building, evacuating is not necessary.
- Call the fire brigade by dialling 999. Do not attempt to tackle the fire yourself.
- Close all doors and windows to restrict the spread of smoke. If you become affected by heat or smoke, leave your flat immediately following the steps above.
- If in doubt – get out (if it is safe to do so). Make your way to the stairwell, exit the building and remain at a safe distance from the building.
- If your route out of the building is blocked by smoke or fire, move away from the fire and seek refuge in a protected area as far away from it as possible, with at least one substantial wall and door between yourself and the fire. Avoid confined spaces.

Do not re-enter the building until authorised to do so. During a fire and rescue operation, the fire brigade will take charge of the building. They will inform you when it is safe to re-enter the building.

If you cannot evacuate because you’re cut off by fire or smoke

Your building has been built to protect you in the event of a fire, so do not automatically assume you must leave your flat. It may be safer for you to ‘stay put’ in your home. In the highly unlikely event that you are cannot leave your flat due to fire, follow this advice:

- If smoke and flames are preventing you from getting out, close the door nearest to the fire and use towels or sheets to block any gaps.
- Go to the window. If the room becomes smoky, lie down on the floor – it’s easier to breathe there because the smoke will rise upwards.
- Open the window and try to attract the attention of others who can alert the fire brigade. Once alerted, they should arrive within a matter of minutes.

In an emergency

DO		Raise the alarm by shouting "fire, fire" and leave the building.
DO		Close the fire doors including your front door if you have to evacuate.
DO		Use the stairs to leave the building.
DO NOT		Use the lifts.
DO NOT		Stop to collect personal belongings
DO NOT		Try to put the fire out yourself

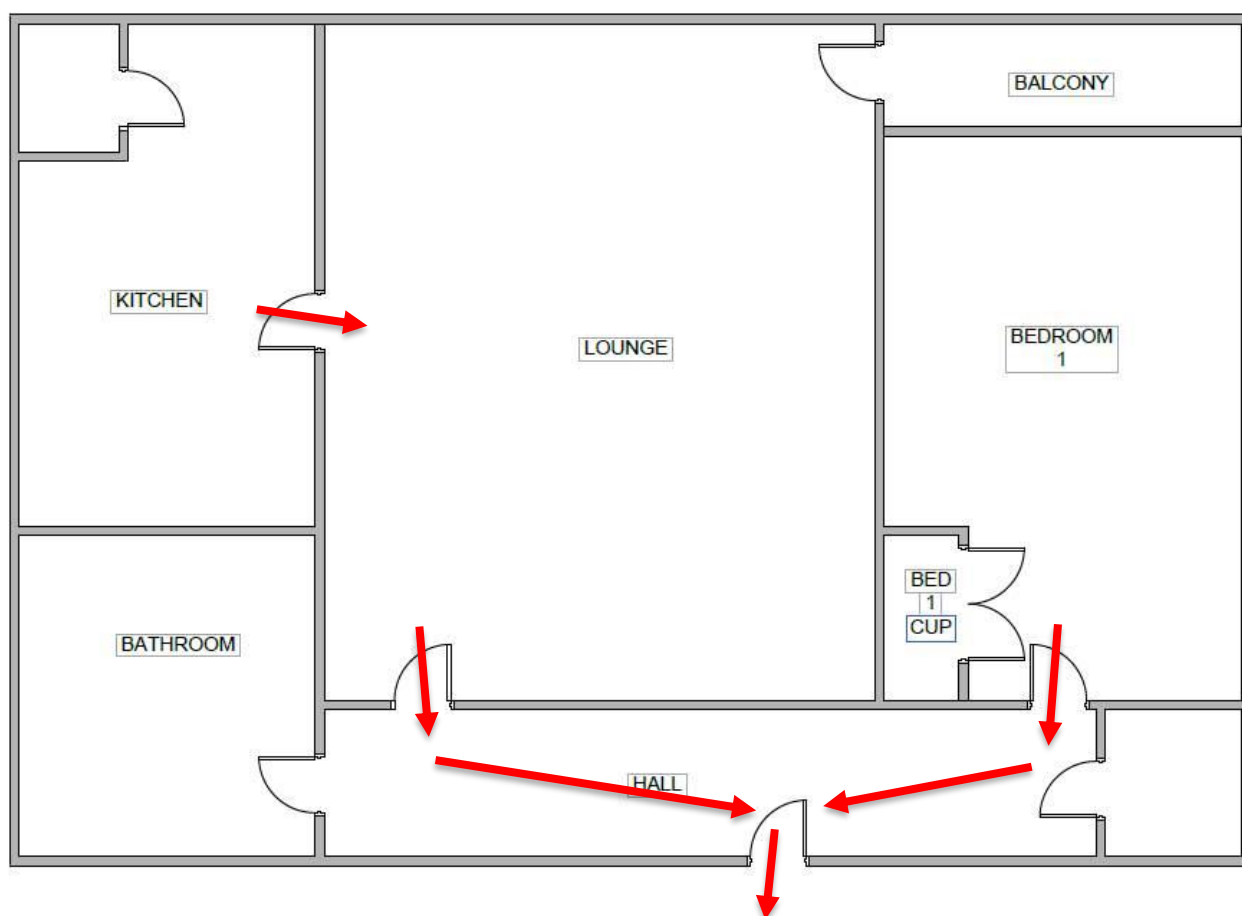
Your escape routes

Getting out of your flat

Your home has been designed with one means of escape. In an emergency, you should evacuate by your front door.

The plan below is a typical flat layout; the red arrows indicate the route to take to get out in an emergency.

Your flat layout may vary slightly. If so, ensure you identify the various exits using the plan below and leave via your front door or the alternative means of escape doors.



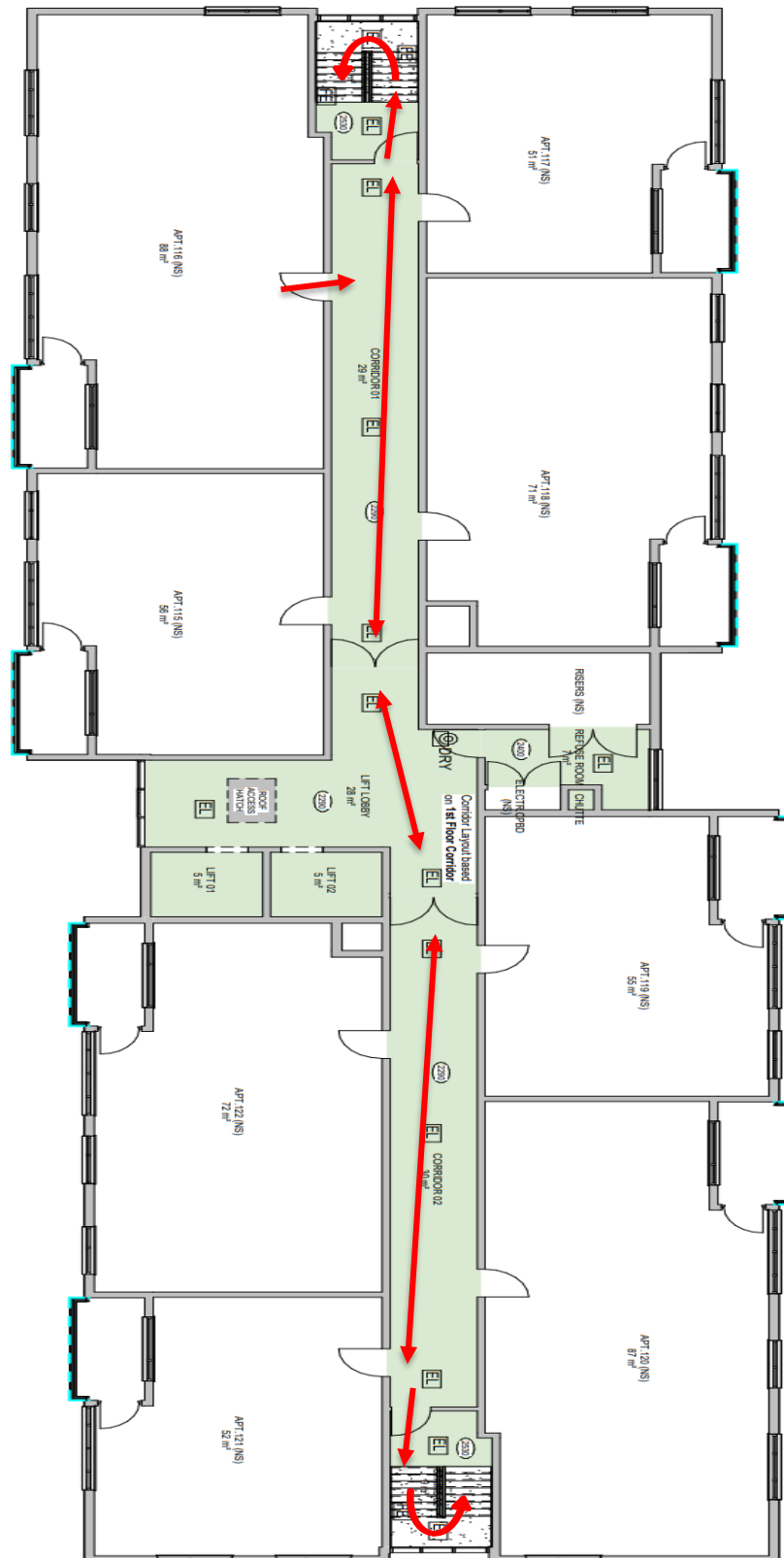
Escape routes from the lobby outside your flat

Once you have evacuated your flat and ensured that the door is properly shut behind you, you will find yourself in a protected access lobby. There is only one direction of escape from the lobby – the staircase. Find the door to the staircase lobby and go through it to reach the protected staircase.

The floor layout for the first to eleventh floors is below. Each floor is the same. The red arrows indicate the route to take to get out in an emergency.

Familiarise yourself with the escape route(s) from your flat. For most homes, that means using the staircase. Never use a lift in an emergency. They are not fireproof and may leave you trapped if the fire causes a power failure.

Once you have evacuated your flat and ensured that the door is latched shut behind you, you will find yourself in a protected corridor. There are two directions of escape from the protected corridor. Choose the shortest way to the protected staircase or if the corridor is affected by smoke and fire turn around and go in the opposite direction.



Follow the staircase to the ground floor. Once on the ground floor, move through the door at the bottom of the stairs and go outside the building.

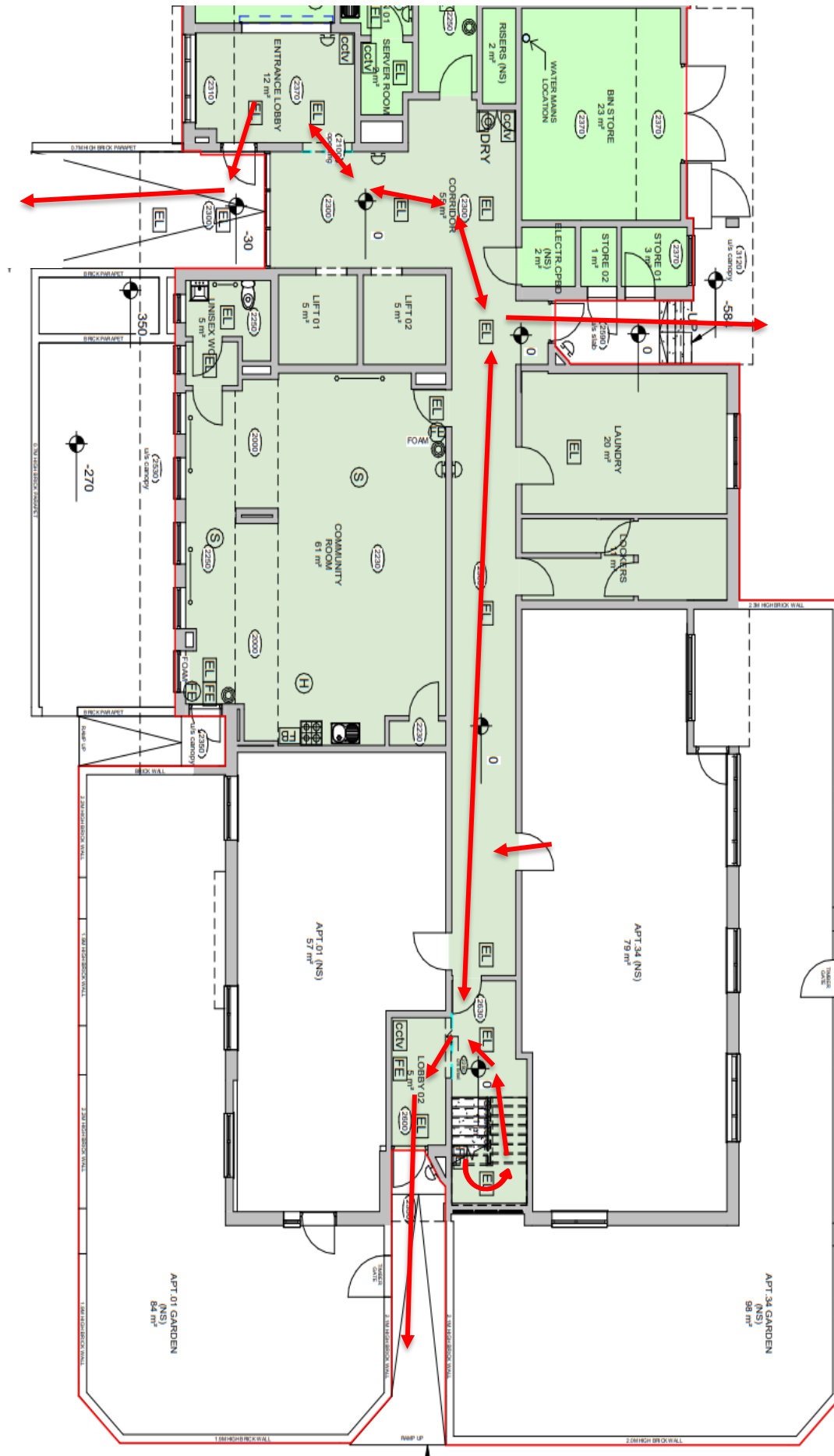
If you are at the ground floor lobby, there are two directions of escape available. Choose whichever is the quickest way to get outside, or if that route is affected by smoke and fire, turn around and go in the opposite direction.

Once outside, get to a place of safety away from the building.

Communal escape routes from the first to the ground floor are shown below in the following diagram.

In the event of an emergency, these escape routes would be vitally important to your safety. They must be kept clear at all times and not obstructed with anything that would slow you down if you had to leave your home quickly. Your life or those of your family and neighbours could be endangered if you have to struggle over obstacles.

Please clear any items that you may have outside your property or in the communal areas. This includes items like bikes, buggies, chairs, shoe racks, rubbish bags, potted plants.



Examples of bad practice

Blocked escape routes



Fire doors that have been blocked open



Fire safety features of your building

In your home

Your home was designed as a fire compartment. This means that all four walls, the ceiling and floor were purposely constructed to both contain and protect you from fire and smoke. Unless a fire starts in your home, you should remain unaffected by a fire elsewhere in the building while emergency services deal with the fire. In rare circumstances, they may instruct you to leave your home. If a fire starts within your home, you should evacuate immediately. Some of the fire safety measures in your home are detailed below.

Detection and warning

A system consists of one or more smoke detectors, a heat detector and a carbon monoxide (CO) detector. The detectors are linked together. If any device is activated, they will all emit a high pitch tone to warn you of a potential incident.

The detection devices may be mains or battery driven with a separate battery to drive the radio link. The batteries are not replaceable and have a ten-year operational life span. It is important to test them weekly.

The CO and heat detectors are installed in kitchens to reduce the number of 'false alarms' caused by cooking. Smoke or heat detectors will be installed in the lounge, hallways, bedrooms and other areas considered a potential risk.



Flat entrance door

The entrance door to your flat is a fire door. It is self-closing and may have strips and seals that help prevent smoke and flames from entering the protected escape route if either your neighbour's or your flat is on fire.

The door will help prevent smoke and flames from entering your flat. It is therefore vital that you ensure the door is properly shut behind you if you must leave your flat because of a fire. Do not tamper with the self-closing device which guarantees that the door shuts if working properly.

You must not make alterations to your door such as fitting security grilles, extra locks or cat flaps, as doing so could compromise your safety.



Internal doors

Some of the internal doors to rooms in your home will also have some fire resistance. These doors do not necessarily need intumescent strips, cold smoke seals or self-closing devices. It is therefore important that you close all your doors at night. Doing so will give you as much time as possible to escape from a fire in your home, particularly if your fire alarm goes off whilst you are asleep.

You must not alter your door by adding things like extra locks or cat flaps, as this will compromise your safety.



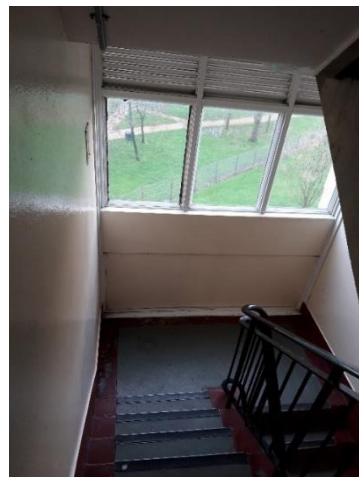
In communal areas of your building

Your block contains many safety measures introduced both when the block was built and added in the years after. This section explains those measures and the role they would play in protecting you from the effects of fire and smoke.

Protected escape routes

These are designed to enable residents from every part of the building to reach the outside without passing through a higher fire risk area. The routes are protected by materials that will provide at least 60 minutes protection from fire and smoke, enabling residents and visitors to reach safety if a fire occurs in the block.

It is vital that the protected routes are kept clear of obstructions and combustible materials, so that anyone evacuating the building does not find that their escape route is itself unusable.



Emergency lighting

You will find these lights in the protected escape routes. In the event of the electricity failing, they will stay lit to guide you along the escape route. There are two types of emergency lighting. The first type will not normally be lit but will have a small green or red light that indicates that they are working. If the electricity fails, they will illuminate. The other type remains lit and are on a protected circuit. That means even if the electricity is cut, they will stay on.



Fire doors

There is more to a fire door than meets the eye. A fire door is part of an assembly comprised of a doorframe, door leaves, other panels, hardware, seals and any glazing that when closed is intended to resist the passage of fire and smoke. When closed, they protect the escape route which enables residents to evacuate.

You will find fire doors on flat entrances, across corridors and stairs on the escape route and on electrical cupboards. They are there to protect your means of escape and should never be wedged or propped open. Fire door leading to an escape route should never be locked or fastened in such a way that means a key is required to make an escape.



Fireman's lift control

If a fire breaks out in your block and the fire brigade are called, it is possible that the electricity to the block will be switched off when they arrive. This means that the lift will not be operational for residents. You must never use a lift if you are aware of a fire in the building, as you may become trapped in it.

The fire brigade can however control the lift for their own firefighting purposes by using the control switch that you will find next to the lift doors.



Fire exit signs and fire action notices

Fire exit signs are designed to identify the means of escape in the event of a fire. They have been strategically positioned throughout the common areas of your block to help identify the direction of travel in the event of a fire occurring.

Fire action notices are designed to inform the occupants of the block what to do in the event of a fire. They have also been strategically positioned throughout the common areas of the block. Where there is only one possible route out, signs may not be so prominent.

Read the fire action notice in your block to ensure you are familiar with it.



Dry risers

Dry risers are used by the fire brigade to get water up to the floors of high-rise blocks. On the ground floor there is a dry riser inlet that the firefighters connect their hoses to, and water is pumped up the vertical pipe to each floor. The firefighters connect to the outlet to fight the fire on each floor.

Dry riser inlets must have fire engine access within 18 metres, so this area must always be kept clear.



Fire hydrants

Fire hydrants can be found in the ground outside near your block. They are sometimes painted yellow but can also be marked with 'FH' or 'FIRE HYDRANT'. Near to the hydrant on the wall there is a yellow 'H' plate, which indicates the size of the pipe and the distance the hydrant is away from the plate. They are used by the fire brigade to provide a supply of water from the mains to be fed into the dry riser inlet. They are in public paths or highways.

Obstructing a hydrant is an offence and can carry a fine if convicted. Please park considerately, away from any adjacent hydrants.

Hydrant defects relating to leakage or safety must be reported to the local water company (as they are the owners). Any other defects or queries can be reported to the London Fire Brigade's water team.



Preventing fires

Our top ten tips for preventing fires

- Ensure a smoke alarm is fitted in the room in your home which opens onto your escape route. Council tenants without a smoke alarm in that position should contact us so we can install one for you.
- Avoid having gas bottles, paraffin, or electric bar fires in your home wherever possible. Use plug-in radiators with safety electric plugs instead.
- Keep the communal areas and the escape route in your home clear of obstructions.
- Ensure that all of the doors in your home are shut at night.
- Do not smoke in the communal areas or escape routes. Anyone smoking on their balconies must put out cigarettes completely and dispose of them carefully. Never throw lit cigarettes or butts over the edge of your balcony.
- Do not cover heating appliances or leave lit candles, incense or heaters unattended close to flammable materials like curtains and furniture.
- Make sure you don't overload electrical sockets, and do not leave phones and tablets to charge on potentially flammable surfaces like bedding.
- Ensure electrical equipment is regularly inspected and serviced.
- Do not store and use white goods such as fridges, freezers or tumble dryers in your lobby or hall at home.
- Never leave cooking unattended. If an oil pan fire starts, turn off the heat (if safe to do so) and cover the pan with a lid or damp cloth.

If you are considered to be 'at risk' or are vulnerable

People with disabilities should be aware of the special devices and help that are available, such as:

- Smoke alarms with vibrating pads or flashing lights for people with hearing impairments.
- Smoke alarms with a strobe light outside the house to catch the attention of neighbours or passers-by.
- Emergency call or alarm systems for summoning help, like Ealing Council's Careline service. You can find out more about that by calling 0300 123 2986.

You can find out more about the devices by contacting the council's fire safety team using the details on the next page.

Your escape plan

Make sure you know your evacuation plan. Talk to your household about what you would do in an emergency and ensure everyone knows when and how to evacuate. If you have a condition which means you would struggle to evacuate from your home in an emergency, let us know - contact your neighbourhood housing officer to request a risk assessment.

Contacts

If you have any queries or concerns relating to fire safety, help is available.

If you see something within your block that you feel compromises your safety, please let us know as soon as possible.

Ealing Council

Fire alarm repairs	020 8825 5682	
Fire safety team	07594 511388	Firesafety-housing@ealing.gov.uk

London Fire Brigade

General enquiries	020 8555 1200	info@london-fire.gov.uk
Water team	020 8555 1200 ext 31553	water@london-fire.gov.uk
Home fire safety visits	0800 028 4428	

For further information on the London Fire Brigade and general fire safety, please go to their website: www.london-fire.gov.uk/FireSafety

Frequently asked questions

What is the 'stay put' strategy?

The London Fire Brigade's policy for people living in purpose-built blocks of flats like yours continues to be 'stay put'. It means:

- When a fire occurs in a flat, the occupants should alert others in the flat and they all make their way out of the building and call the fire brigade.
- If a fire starts in the communal parts of the block (for example the stairs, lobbies or corridors), people in those areas must make their way out of the building and call the fire brigade.
- All residents not directly affected by the fire should 'stay put' in their flat unless told to leave by the fire brigade.

This does not mean that anyone not directly affected who wants to leave the building should be prevented from doing so. It is also not intended to stop anyone who is evacuating a flat which is on fire from alerting their neighbours so that they can also escape if they feel threatened.

This policy has been used by all UK housing providers since the 1960s. It reflects current and previous building regulations which require these blocks to have high levels of fire compartmentation. That means that all four walls, the ceiling and floor were purposely designed to protect inhabitants from fire and smoke. The policy is the recommended method for residential buildings as defined in the government guidance 'Fire Safety in Purpose Built Blocks of Flats' and by the fire brigade.

Why does my block not have alarms in the communal areas?

Ealing Council has not installed communal smoke alarm systems in the communal areas of our blocks for a number of reasons.

In general needs blocks designed to support the 'stay put' strategy detailed above, communal fire alarm systems are unnecessary and undesirable, as they would inevitably lead to a proliferation of false alarms. This would impose a burden on the fire brigade and result in residents ignoring warnings of genuine fires.

Secondly, if alarms systems in communal areas were activated, that would indicate that there is fire or smoke in the escape route. Therefore, residents evacuating their properties could potentially be entering an unsafe area of the building, which would both risk their safety and impede the emergency services.

Finally, we would not usually fit communal smoke detectors in a purpose-built block of flats unless it was there to operate automatic opening vents, which allow smoke to escape to the open air, but those detectors would not have sounders.

Why does my block only have one staircase?

Purpose-built blocks of flats are not required to have more than one staircase for means of escape. This is due to the high level of compartmentation in those buildings. Stairs in these buildings are protected from the effects of fire and smoke for a long period of time, usually between one and two hours. These stairs are designed to accommodate residents who need to escape from the block and for firefighting purposes.