

Chapter 18: Be safe

Most accidents happen at home. By taking a few sensible precautions, you can reduce the risk to you and your family.

Fire

If there is a fire in your flat, please follow this guidance.

- Don't try to put it out, unless you can do so safely and quickly.
- Leave the room immediately and close the door.
- Make sure everyone leaves the flat, closing all the doors behind them.
- If the fire prevents you from leaving your flat, go to one room and close the door behind you. Then put a wet towel at the bottom of the door and stay low on the floor.
- Do not open windows, as this will help the fire to spread through your flat.
- Call the fire brigade immediately. Dial 999, give the number of the phone you are calling from and ask for the fire brigade. They will ask for your name and address and where the fire is. Do not hang up until they repeat your address.
- Once you've left the flat, wait for the emergency services, who may want more information from you.

If there is a fire somewhere else in your block of flats

Call the fire brigade immediately. Unless the fire brigade tells you to evacuate, you will normally be safe if you stay in your flat. Close all the doors and windows to keep out the smoke. If smoke gets in, leave immediately, closing the door behind you. If the fire is near your flat or is in a property joined to yours, you should leave the building immediately. Do not use the lifts when there is a fire.

Remember the following.

- Closing doors slows down the spread of the fire and reduces the main danger – smoke.
- Keep escape routes clear – don't keep large items such as furniture on shared balconies and landings.
- Don't wedge self-closing doors open. These doors are normally fire-resistant. They help to stop fire and smoke spreading, but only

when they are closed. If any of the self-closing doors are not working properly, **please report it to us on 0800 195 3404**.

- Before you go to bed or go out, close as many doors in your flat as you can. If a fire does start, this will help to stop it spreading. You should unplug all electrical appliances when you are not using them, especially overnight.

Smoke alarms

Smoke alarms are a cheap way of giving you early warning of a fire.

You can buy them in most hardware shops and supermarkets. If you have smoke alarms, they should be on stair landings and outside the kitchen or bedrooms (or both). You should also check the batteries each week.

Materials that catch fire easily (liquid petroleum gas (LPG), paraffin and so on)

See chapter 13 for more details.

Water

Make sure you know where the stopcock is so you can turn off the water if you need to.

- If your water supply is cut off, make sure that you turn off all the taps and remove plugs from all sinks and baths to prevent a flood when the water comes back on.
- If you get a **burst pipe**, do the following.
 - Turn off the water supply.
 - Turn off the electricity at the mains. Use a wooden spoon or broom handle to flip the switch if the unit is in contact with water.
 - Catch as much water as you can with buckets, pans and cloths.
 - Report the repair to us.

We are responsible for the water pipes in your home.

Security

- Never let strangers into your home unless they can prove who they are. All our staff carry identity badges and so will people from the gas, electricity and water companies. If you are suspicious, contact the police.
- The crime-prevention officer at your local police station can advise you on how to make your home more secure.
- Make sure that controlled-entry doors are closed properly, and do not let strangers into the block. If the doors are faulty, please let us know.
- Good lighting increases security, so please report any faulty lighting in the shared areas of your block or estate as soon as possible.
- If you are going away, leave your home securely locked and check that the windows are closed. You might want to take further security measures, such as fitting timer switches on your lights. It's also a good idea to turn off the water and gas supplies.

Windows

If you have windows fitted with safety catches, make sure the catches are only released for cleaning and the windows are secured when you have finished. You should never leave a window unattended when the catch is off.

You can get more tips about safety on our website at www.homesforharingey.org