

A Fire Survival Guide

Every year the fire brigade is called out to over 60,000 fires in the home. And every year around 500 people die in these fires and over 10,000 are injured.

If a fire occurs in your flat, your chances of survival will depend on how quickly and safely you are able to get out.

This advice on how to protect yourself should one occur.

Planning your escape route:

If a fire occurs in your flat you may have to get out in dark and difficult conditions.

Escaping from a fire will be a lot easier if you have already planned your escape route and know where to go. Make sure that the communal hallway remains free of any obstructions and that there are no loose floor coverings that could trip you – if you find anything that concerns you in the common parts, inform Westbury Residential immediately. Everyone living in the flat should be made aware of the escape route.

If you have serious mobility difficulties you may wish to consider having your bedroom as near as possible to an exit. If you need assistance to make your escape, it is vital that you have some means of summoning help by your bed, such as a buzzer, intercom or telephone.

What to do if a fire breaks out:

We all try to prevent fire starting in our home. But it only takes an unguarded or careless moment for a fire to start. A couple of minutes later and your home could be filled with smoke. Smoke and fumes can kill – particularly the highly poisonous smoke from some furnishings. You will only have a short time to get out. Use it wisely and try not to panic.

- If you can safely do so, close the door of the room where the fire has started and close all other doors behind you. This will help delay the spread of smoke.
- Before opening a closed door, use the back of your hand to touch it. Don't open it if it feels warm – the fire may be on the other side.
- Get everyone out as quickly as possible. Don't try to pick up valuables or possessions. Make your way out as safely as possible and try not to panic.
- Never go back into your home until a fire officer has told you it is safe.

It will help if you have planned your escape route rather than waiting until there is a fire. Telephone the fire brigade on 999 from a neighbour's house or a telephone box.

Clearly state the address of the fire.

What to do if you're cut off by fire:

It's not easy, but try to remain calm. Save your energy to help you survive

- If you are prevented from getting out because of flames or smoke, close the door nearest to the fire and use towels or sheets to block any gaps. This will help stop smoke spreading into the room.
- Go to the window. If the room becomes smoky, go down to floor level – it's easier to breathe because the smoke will rise upwards.
- Open the window, try to attract the attention of others who can alert the fire brigade. Wait for the fire brigade, they should arrive in a matter of minutes.
- If you are in immediate danger and your room is not too high from the ground, drop cushions or bedding to the ground below to break your fall from the window.
- Get out feet first and lower yourself to the full length of your arms before dropping.

Bedtime Routine:

Many fires in the home start at night. Make sure you have a bedtime fire safety routine to help keep you and your family safe. Here are a few simple things you should do every night:

- Switch off and unplug all electrical appliances not designed to stay on. (There are specially designed plugs available which can be very easily inserted and removed. Details of these devices are available from the Disabled Living Foundation.
- Make sure no cigarettes or pipes are still burning. Never smoke in bed.
- Before emptying ashtrays make sure the contents are cold.
- Switch off portable heaters.
- Close the doors of all rooms.

If a fire occurs elsewhere in the building, the procedure will depend on whether there is a "stay put" policy or an evacuation requirement.

Staying Put:

Fire safety in blocks of flats is highly dependent upon fire resistant construction. When considering the construction of individual houses, the way they are constructed with party wall separation is a large part of ensuring that fire does not pass from one dwelling to the next. In flats, the concept is similar but is achieved through effective compartmentation of the individual flats within a block, and the protection of common areas and corridors to help ensure escape.

The inclusion of fire resistant compartmentation should help to ensure that fire is contained in its area of origin and does not endanger those flats nearby. This is the basis of the 'Stay put' policy which means that any persons in the flat of fire origin will need to evacuate, but that their neighbours should not need to evacuate and will remain safe.

This policy of non-evacuation of neighbouring flats has been in place for more than fifty years and has proved effective. In rare circumstances, where the fire resistant construction has been breached, it could be that fire may spread within a block, in which case, full evacuation is necessary and is usually instigated by the Fire Service.

The 'Stay put' policy follows simple guidelines; those occupants of the fire origin flat must evacuate the premises and summon the Fire Service. If a fire occurs in a common area, any persons in that area should leave the building and call the emergency services. The remainder of the building's occupants are safe to remain in their flats, unless directed to leave by the Fire Service.

Some residents in surrounding flats may wish to evacuate the premises in any case, and of course, should not be prevented from doing so.

In those blocks of flats where the level of compartmentation is unknown, or uninvestigated, it may be prudent to have a voluntary risk assessment undertaken by fire engineers to receive advice on the standard of construction and the advisability of the 'Stay put' policy. However, it is true that most purpose built blocks are sufficiently compartmentalised and fire safe to support the policy.

Evacuating the Building:

Not all converted buildings comply with the up to date methods of construction and compartmentalisation that apply to most modern purpose built blocks of flats. This may mean that in certain circumstances it is necessary, in case of fire being detected either in the common parts or in a flat, it is necessary to evacuate the block as quickly and calmly as possible.

Some converted properties do have a fire or smoke alarm system and if this is heard (unless you have been advised of a test) all residents should leave the building by the quickest possible route, checking that all occupants have heard the alarm and closing doors behind you.

If the property has no audible warning system in case of fire or smoke, if you should discover an incident, remain as calm as possible, whilst exiting the building by the quickest possible route, knocking on the doors of other flats and shouting "FIRE" as loudly as possible. At the first opportunity phone 999 to alert the fire brigade and give the address of the flats and your name as clearly as possible.

You **MUST NOT** use the lifts if a fire has been identified under any circumstances unless instructed to do so by the Fire Brigade.

It is absolutely essential, if you live in an older converted building that does not benefit from fire safety precautions, that you familiarise yourself with the potential routes out of the building should an incident occur.

When leaving the building you should congregate at a safe distance away from the property and await the fire brigade.

Where a building is lacking in fire safety precautions Westbury Residential are conducting fire safety reviews and will be working with Freeholders and block Directors to undertake measures to protect the safety of owners and residents.

If you have any queries or concerns about fire prevention and action planning for the block where you live or own a flat, please do not hesitate to get in touch at mail@westburyresidential.co.uk