

Fire Safety in flats

A guide to fire safety in all types of flats for council tenants and leaseholders.



Fire Safety in Communal Areas Policy

- Cambridge City Council operates a zero-tolerance policy regarding items left in communal areas.
- Residents are not permitted to use the communal areas to store any belongings or dispose of rubbish as this can increase the likelihood of fire, or block evacuation and access routes.
- Any items deemed as posing a significant fire risk will be removed immediately.
- For more information on the policy, you can view it on our website: [cambridge.gov.uk/housing-services-policies](https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/housing-services-policies)

Communal areas

These are parts of a block of flats, street or estate that residents have a right to use alongside other residents, and for which the council as the landlord and freeholder is responsible. This includes communal gardens. Communal areas are non-smoking spaces.

- The council needs your help to keep communal areas free of any obstructions, trip and fire hazards. This includes, but is not limited to, pushchairs, bicycles, e-bikes, e-scooters, mobility scooters, plants, doormats, binbags, furniture or other household items.
- Bicycles, e-bikes or e-scooters must not be stored in communal areas as they could hamper evacuation. Residents should find alternative storage locations.
- Mobility scooters should be kept inside your home. Contact the council for advice and assistance where this might not be considered feasible. A formal risk assessment will need to be undertaken.
- Bin store doors should be kept closed – large items of household waste such as furniture should not be left in the bin store. Residents should make arrangements for them to be collected.
- Individual wheelie bins should not be left in communal areas or under staircases. Where provided, wheelie bins should be stored in areas away from the building.
- Storage and electrical metre cupboards must not be used to store personal belongings. Doors to storage cupboards should be kept shut.

Charging e-bikes and e-scooters

- Do not charge e-bikes or e-scooters in a communal area, these should be charged in your home.
- Follow the manufacturer's instructions when charging, and always unplug your charger when your device is fully charged.
- Charge batteries whilst you are awake and alert so if a fire should occur, you can respond quickly. Don't leave batteries to charge while you are asleep or away from the home.
- Always use the manufacturer approved charger for the product, and if you spot any signs of wear and tear or damage, buy an official replacement charger for your product from a reputable seller.
- Do not cover chargers or battery packs when charging, as this could lead to overheating or even a fire.
- Do not charge batteries or store your e-bike or e-scooter near combustible or flammable materials.
- Do not overcharge your battery – check the manufacturer's instructions for charge times.
- Do not overload socket outlets or use inappropriate extension leads (use uncoiled extensions and ensure the lead is suitably rated for what you are plugging into it).

In the event of an e-bike, e-scooter, or lithium-ion battery fire: do not attempt to extinguish the fire. Get out, stay out, call 999.

Whilst e-bikes and e-scooters offer a great way around the city, if the batteries become damaged or begin to fail, they can start dangerous fires.

Lithium battery fires can spread quickly out of control, and within seconds, start a large fire. When these batteries are charged in communal areas or escape routes, a fire breaking out can quickly block people's ability to escape.



What to do in the event of a fire

Plan ahead

- Make an evacuation plan - how will you and everyone in your home escape?
- Practise your plan with your household.
- Make sure your fire detectors/alarms work. Check them regularly, ideally once a month, by pushing the test button. You might not be able to test your alarm if it is hardwired. Our staff will let you know if this is the case.
- Make sure everyone can easily find door and window keys.
- Think about a room you can go to where you can be seen from outside.
- Get into the habit of closing all doors at night.
- Keep escape routes clear of obstructions and items that can burn.
- Do not block access roads to your building.

If there is a fire inside your flat, you should get out, stay out and call 999

- Alert everyone in the flat and leave, closing doors and windows behind you.
- Feel doors with the back of your hand. Do not open doors if they feel warm.
- Do not look for the fire or try to put it out.
- It is important that you close your main flat entrance door on your way out.
- If it is safe to do so, make your neighbours aware of the fire.
- Don't use the lifts - only use the stairs.
- When you are out of the building and can find a phone, call 999 - don't assume someone else has done it.
- Do not re-enter the building.
- Call the fire service even if it is a small fire.

If there is a fire elsewhere in the building, you should call 999 immediately

- If there's a fire in another flat or a communal area, you are usually safer staying put - unless you are affected by the fire or smoke.
- Stay by the window or balcony where you can be seen. Place damp towels or bedding around any door frames to prevent smoke entering the room.
- If you choose to leave your flat, only do it if it is safe and close your windows and door behind you.
- Call the fire service by phoning 999 and tell them where you live, your flat number, the floor level and whether or not you are still in the building.

Sheltered Housing Schemes

If you live in one of our indoor sheltered housing schemes, please ensure you know about the fire safety procedures and if there is a stay put policy in place for your specific scheme. If you are unsure, please contact your Independent Living Facilitator on 01223 457199.

Fire prevention where you live

The most common causes of fires are:



Kitchen fires: Take extra care when cooking and avoid the use of deep fat fryers. Distraction is also a common cause of kitchen fires. Never leave cooking unattended. Avoid becoming distracted while in the kitchen.



Appliances: Switch off appliances at night and buy appliances from trustworthy sources. Ensure any appliances including chargers and batteries meet the current safety standards. It is recommended that you register your appliances at registermyappliance.org.uk. If possible, don't leave appliances on when you go out.



Heating: Use only the fixed heating system in your home. Be careful how you use portable heaters – use only a convector heater in your hallway. Do not use gas, paraffin, or electric bar heaters.



Electrical sockets*: Don't use adapters to overload sockets. Have no more than one plug in each socket. The council will periodically inspect fixed electrical wiring to ensure it is safe.



Cigarettes: Stub out cigarettes and dispose of them properly. Avoid smoking in bed or where you are likely to fall asleep. Keep smoking materials hidden and out of reach of children.



Candles: Make sure candles are on a flat surface, in a fireproof holder and don't light them near children, pets, curtains or other fabric. All candles should be extinguished when leaving the property and when going to bed.



Rubbish: Put all rubbish in the bins provided and ensure any bin-room doors are closed behind you.



Gas appliances*: If you have a gas boiler, ensure the council is given access to service and maintain it annually.



Deliberate fires: Arson is a cause of fires. Where possible keep where you live secure and keep communal areas clear of combustible items.

* Leaseholders are responsible for gas and electrical safety regulatory compliance within their property.

Fire safety features in a building containing flats

Our flats are built to give you some protection from fire. Walls, floors and doors will hold back flames and smoke for a while. If you are in your flat, you are usually safer staying there unless heat or smoke is affecting you.



Fire Doors

- Flat entrance doors are fire-resisting and self-closing. They must not be disconnected or wedged open.
- Fire doors are crucial fire safety features designed to slow the spread of fire and smoke. If fire doors are propped open, smoke and fire can spread and will stop people from evacuating safely.
- Please report any defects with fire doors directly to the council on 01223 457000 – please ask for ‘repairs’.



Sprinklers

- There might be fire sprinklers in your flat.
- These are designed to stop a fire spreading and may even put it out. They could save your life.
- You will be able to recognise these by the small white flush covers (discs) on the ceilings.
- Do not pull on the discs – the sprinkler will drop down and activate.
- Do not paint over the discs as this may delay them operating if there is a fire.



Some blocks of flats in Cambridge have extra fire safety features installed.

The flats where you live might have a pipe fitted for the fire service to pump water through to fight a fire in the building. These should be kept clear of obstructions and not tampered with to ensure they work when they are needed in an emergency. If you are a tenant in one of these buildings you will be provided with information about these features which you should be aware of.

Lifts in flats should not be used in the event of fire unless they are evacuation lifts.

Red fire alarm call points are not normally located inside flats. However, there are some flats in Cambridge that have fire alarm call points in the stairways and communal areas. They can be used to sound the fire alarm in these areas only – they do not sound fire alarms in individual flats.

Some blocks of flats have opening windows/vents to release smoke from the communal areas and these should not be tampered with. They may be opened manually by the fire service, or sometimes they open upon activation of a smoke alarm. These smoke alarms do not sound or raise an alarm in the event of fire but are only there to open the window/vent.

Green boxes – some flats have electronic security locks on the main entry/exit doors. These have a 'push to exit' button which should still work when there is a fire. There might be a small green box next to this button that looks like a fire alarm break glass box. If the normal button does not work, you can break the green box glass to release the door lock to exit the building.



What the council does to improve fire safety

As part of regular compliance and maintenance work, we do routine checks on buildings containing flats to make sure that the appropriate fire prevention and safety measures are in place.

Our checks include:

- Responding to reports of any items which could block a fire escape route (including bulky rubbish and flytipping).
- Fire risk assessments in every building.
- Ensuring that communal doors are in full working order.
- Testing smoke detection equipment.
- Testing emergency lighting.
- Annual gas safety checks for tenants – we will contact you to make an appointment for this to be carried out.

If you have any concerns about fire safety in your block of flats, please contact us on **01223 457000**.

Further fire safety guidance can be found at:

www.cambsfire.gov.uk/firesafety | www.gov.uk/firekills

If you would like additional information or to receive this information in a different format, please call us on **01223 457000**, or write to us at **Cambridge City Council, PO Box 700, Cambridge, CB1 0JH**.