Fire safety: what directors must do

The duties that fall on the person in control of the common parts of a residential building, and a practical routine for meeting them.

Fire safety is the area where the stakes are highest, and where the law has become stricter since the Grenfell Tower fire. For the common parts of a residential building, the duties sit with the "responsible person": the person who has control of the premises, which is often the management company or its directors.

The legal framework

In England, the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 applies to the common parts of blocks of flats. It requires the responsible person to carry out a suitable and sufficient fire risk assessment, act on it, and keep it under review. The Fire Safety (England) Regulations 2022 added further duties for multi-occupied residential buildings, with more for taller buildings: for example, giving residents fire safety information and checking certain fire doors. The detail depends on the height of the building, so take advice on which apply to you.

The fire risk assessment

- It must be carried out by a competent person: ask about their qualifications and experience.
- It should cover the common parts, the means of escape, detection and alarm, emergency lighting, compartmentation, fire doors and the management of fire safety.
- It should lead to a written action plan, with priorities and dates.
- Review it regularly, and whenever the building or its use changes.
- Share the key findings with residents.

Routine checks

Set a schedule and keep records of every check:

- **Fire alarm and detection:** regular tests and servicing by a competent engineer.
- **Emergency lighting:** periodic tests and servicing.
- **Fire doors:** check the common-part doors for damage, gaps and self-closing action, and keep them closed.
- **Escape routes:** keep them clear of belongings, bikes, prams and rubbish.
- **Firefighting equipment,** where fitted: inspection and servicing.

- **Smoke vents and dry risers,** where fitted.

Residents

Tell residents what to do in a fire, and what not to do: for example, not to wedge doors open or store items in corridors. Explain the building's evacuation strategy. Remind them regularly.

Records

Keep copies of the risk assessments, action plans, certificates, service records and the fire strategy. Use a calendar to schedule each item, and make sure the records can be found when a director steps down.

Actions must be completed

An assessment that is not acted on gives no protection. Record each action, who owns it, the date and whether it was done. Where work is needed, consider whether consultation requirements apply before you commission it.

Getting help

Fire risk assessors, fire door inspectors and the local fire and rescue service can advise. For taller buildings and those with unusual construction, take specialist advice early.

> Keep the evidence. If anything goes wrong, the board will need to show what it knew, what it did and when.

Next steps

1. Confirm who is the responsible person.
2. Check the date of the last risk assessment.
3. Set up the check schedule.
4. Brief residents.

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