

## **Fire Safety for Child minders and Day-Care Providers**

The Requirements for the Childcare Register for childcare in domestic and non-domestic premises issued by Ofsted state “The registered person must ensure that the children receiving childcare are kept safe from harm” which will include fire safety. It also says “The registered person must undertake a risk assessment of the premises and equipment at least once in each calendar year, and immediately, where the need for an assessment arises. The registered person must ensure that all necessary measures are taken to minimise any identified risks.”

Childcare facilities will be offered in a wide range of premises. These can broadly be divided into two main types:

- Day-care providers, for example, full day care, sessional day care, out-of-school care and crèches, may be offered in non-domestic premises.
- Child minding that takes place in domestic premises.

There is an opinion that they are both subject to The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (RRFSO) when used for child minding activities, but this is not absolutely clear. For non-domestic premises which are subject to the above RRFSO, the fire risk assessment conducted by the Responsible Person should be considered acceptable by the Ofsted inspectors.

It is in the domestic premises where problems may arise and the childminder may not consider themselves competent to conduct a risk assessment with regards to fire safety.

### **Fire Safety Standards**

This guidance note had been prepared with the objective of informing childcare providers about the fire safety standards that inspectors will expect providers to achieve. It is in the interests of childcare providers and their clients that a high standard of fire safety is maintained in childcare facilities. This does not necessarily mean that onerous measures need to be taken, but an adequate assessment of the hazards must be carried out. Once identified, risks should ideally be removed or reduced to an acceptable level.

Sufficient and suitable arrangements for early detection of fire should be in place and once the alarm is raised, safe evacuation will depend upon a well-rehearsed emergency plan. There should also be adequate arrangements in place for maintaining fire safety equipment and for training staff in emergency procedures.

This note gives guidance on childcare facilities which may be found in a wide variety of building types and may be ancillary to several different purpose groups (for example, a crèche in an office building or a small group in a community hall). In general these will already be subject to fire safety requirements under the RRFSO. Where a fire risk assessment already exists for the premises, it should be reviewed to take account of the childcare facility.

A fire risk assessment shall be required for domestic premises, when used as a child minding facility, but will not be as onerous as for non-domestic premises.

### **Non-Domestic Premises used for Childminding Activities**

All non-domestic premises will already be subject to fire safety requirements under the RRFSO. If your childcare facility forms part of larger premises and is used for different purposes at different times, you will need to coordinate your planning with other Responsible Persons. In this regard, ask if you can see any existing fire risk assessment and the emergency plan for the premises and, if available, consider how it relates to your childcare facility.

If you are defined as a Responsible Person for the purposes of the RRFSO then a fire safety officer may need to see and discuss with you the significant findings of your fire risk assessment for your childcare facility.

If no fire risk assessment exists for the premises then you should refer to the new guidance documents

Where a fire risk assessment already exists for the premises, it should be reviewed. This review should focus on the issues that relate to the childcare provision including the following:

- The location of the childcare facility within the building. Ideally it should be situated on the ground floor with an exit directly to the outside of the building. Where this is not possible it should be as near to the ground floor as possible.
- The layout of the childcare facility should be conducive to a safe escape, with any cooking or heating facility being sited remote from the exits.
- There should be adequate escape routes from the childcare facility. Fire doors protecting the escape routes should be self-closing and fire resisting. Doors across escape routes and at exits should be easily opened without the need of a key.
- Escape routes should be free from obstruction and adequately lit. There should be adequate signage indicating escape routes and particularly alternative routes.
- Additional automatic fire detection may be required to ensure adequate early detection and warning of fire. If a two stage fire alarm system is installed, the evacuation of the children should commence on the first-stage alert.
- Sufficient numbers of trained staff should be available to enable a safe and efficient evacuation, taking into account the need to assist or carry children. Parents should be advised of the procedures including the location of the assembly point.

- There should be an induction process for new staff and regular training and fire drills for all staff and children. The importance of keeping fire doors shut should be emphasized.
- Training should include the means of raising the alarm, the evacuation plan, the location of the external assembly point and how to call the fire brigade. If fire-fighting equipment is provided then a suitable number of staff should be trained in its use.
- Fire safety procedures and notices should be written and displayed to provide information to staff and visitors about emergency plans.

### **Domestic Dwellings used for Childminding Activities**

This guidance establishes a common basic standard of fire precautions for domestic dwellings used for child minding activities. The guidance is relevant for persons who are considering applying for registration.

It is important that child minders know what to do in the event of a fire and that they make a fire plan. This should include ensuring that the escape routes are unobstructed and free from trip hazards, the means of raising the alarm in the event of fire, an evacuation plan with an external assembly point and how to call the fire brigade in the event of fire.

### **Escape Routes**

Child minding in private dwellings does not normally present a high risk to life from fire and it is important that a homely and non-institutional environment is maintained. In providing fire protection in any kind of dwelling, it should be recognised that measures that significantly interfere with everyday convenience may be unreliable in the long term.

The escape routes from one or two storey dwellings are generally straightforward. Therefore, few provisions are necessary beyond ensuring that each habitable room likely to be used for child minding either opens directly onto a hallway or stair leading to the entrance of the dwelling, or that it has a window or door through which escape could be made. All exits required for escape purposes should be easily openable by adults, preferably without the use of a key.

Newly constructed premises should automatically comply since they will have been subjected to the requirements for means of escape and structural fire precautions under the Building Regulations. In existing premises, care will be needed to ensure that areas used for child minding are not inner rooms without the adequate safeguards.

An Inner Room is where the only escape route is through another room. Occupants of the inner room may be at risk from a fire in the access room. Such an arrangement is only acceptable where the inner room is:

- a) a kitchen
- b) a laundry or utility room

- c) a dressing room
- d) a bathroom, WC, or shower room
- e) any other room on the ground or first storey which has an openable window or external door suitable for escape and which has an openable area of at least 0.33m<sup>2</sup> and is at least 450mm high and 450mm wide. The opening should be not more than 1100mm above the floor. For dormer windows and roof lights see Approved Document B to the Building Regulations.

In cases where child minding will take place in the inner room it is recommended that a smoke detector be installed in the access room or, if possible, a vision panel should be fitted in the door or wall to the inner room.

### **Smoke Alarms (Domestic dwellings)**

Other than where overnight care is provided, it is considered sufficient for smoke alarms to be installed in circulation areas only. It is recommended that they be installed in accordance with the following recommendations:

- In a dwelling that has child minding accommodation on more than one storey, there should be at least one smoke alarm at each available floor level.
- There should be a smoke alarm within 7m of the doors to rooms where a fire is likely to start (the kitchen or living room) and within 3m of the bedroom.
- If more than one smoke alarm is required in the premises, consideration should be given to connecting them together so that they all operate their warning signal if any one detector operates. This should only be necessary if the building is of such a size or design that the operation of one detector may not give sufficient warning audibility throughout the premises.
- Smoke alarms should be accessible to carry out routine maintenance, such as testing and cleaning, easily and safely. For this reason smoke alarm should not be fixed directly over a stair shaft or any other opening between floors.
- Smoke alarms should not be fixed next to, or directly above heaters or air conditioning outlets. They should not be fixed in bathrooms, showers, cooking areas or garages, or any other place where steam, condensation or fumes could give false alarms (unless designed specifically for this use).
- All smoke alarms need to be checked regularly at the following intervals to ensure they are in good working order
  - Weekly – press test button to ensure the circuit is operating;
  - Yearly – Replace the battery (unless it is of a longer life type) and test by pressing the test button, and otherwise as recommended in the manufacturer's instructions.

Having regard to the statutory duty of Ofsted to inspect registered child minders premises, it is considered that it would be reasonable to accept battery-operated smoke alarms as an alternative to them being permanently wired to the mains.

Mains wired alarms are preferred, though, and will automatically be installed in newly constructed dwellings under the Building Regulations. Where mains wired smoke alarms are fitted, they should have a backup battery and be permanently wired to a regularly used lighting circuit. The wiring installation should conform to the Institution of Electrical Engineering Wiring Regulations.

### **Fire Fighting Equipment**

Child minders should keep a fire blanket to BS EN safety standards in the kitchen. Other firefighting equipment is not normally necessary and child minders should be reminded that, should a fire occur, their first priority is the safe evacuation of the children.

### **Suitable Heating**

Portable heaters, whether using liquefied petroleum gas, paraffin or electricity, are not regarded as safe forms of heating for child minding activities and their use should be prohibited except in exceptional circumstances (power cuts etc). On such occasions, the heater should be securely anchored in a safe and suitable position and away from draughts.

A substantial guard constructed to BS 6539 specification and securely fixed in position should enclose solid fuel fires and heating appliances, other than low-pressure hot water radiators. No part of the guard should be closer than 200mm from the heat source, otherwise the guard may get dangerously hot.

### **Cooking**

Children should be kept out of the kitchen area unless they are well supervised and constantly monitored. There should be no deep fat frying cooking when any children are in the kitchen. Matches should not be used for lighting gas cookers. (See also smoking materials).

### **Smoking Materials**

Under the Welfare Requirements smoking in front of children is prohibited by any member of the household. Cigarettes, lighters and matches must always be kept out of sight, out of reach and preferably in a secure cabinet.

### **Foam Filled Furniture**

Upholstered furniture should comply with the Furniture and Furnishings (Fire Safety) Regulations. In general, the Regulations require that upholstered articles

must have a fire resistant filling, most cover fabrics must have passed a match resistance test and the combination of the cover fabric and filling material must have passed a cigarette resistance test.

## **Electrical Wiring**

There should be no obvious defects in the electrical wiring system. Sockets and switches should be securely fixed to the wall and sockets should be of a safety pattern. Flex to electrical appliances should not be run under carpets. The use of multiple adapters should be discouraged, however, where their use is unavoidable, care should be taken that they are not overloaded. It is recommended that covers should be provided to electrical sockets not in use. Fuses should be correctly rated for the appliance in use:

- Up to 700 watts – 3 amp fuse
- 700-1000 watts – 5 amp fuse
- over 1000 watts – 13 amp fuse

## **Overnight Care**

Additional considerations should be given for overnight care because fire risks are potentially greater at night when people are asleep. In addition to the detailed guidance in this note, those offering overnight care need to ensure that:

- There is adequate automatic fire detection (smoke alarm/detector) to ensure early detection of a fire, including coverage of the areas used for overnight care and the escape routes from it. Where more than one alarm/detector is required, it will be necessary to link them together so that the operation of one actuates the alarm signal in them all.
- In a dwelling that has child minding accommodation on more than one storey, there should be at least one smoke alarm at each available storey level. There should be a smoke alarm within 7m of the doors to rooms where a fire is likely to start (the kitchen or living room) and within 3m of the bedroom.
- A bedtime routine is followed ensuring that gas and electrical appliances are turned off and that all smoking materials are safely extinguished.
- All doors should be closed and checked before retiring.
- Sufficient adults are available to ensure a safe and efficient evacuation taking into account the need to assist or carry children.

## **Further Information**

Professional Association For Childcare And Early Years

Freephone: 0300 003 0005

Website: [www.pacey.org.uk](http://www.pacey.org.uk)

If you require any further guidance on the advice given in this Guidance Note please contact your local Fire and Rescue Service.