



Fire Safety on the Barbican Estate – Information for Residents

FAQ No. 2 August 2017

(new or amended FAQs appear in italics/red. We have added a section at the end of this FAQ titled “What can you do”?)

Since the tragic fire at Grenfell Tower, we have been asked a number of questions by residents. We felt it would be useful for everyone on the estate to see these questions, and our answers.

Get in touch with us

If you have any further questions, please contact the Estate Office. Staff there will be happy to come to your home and show you your fire escape route if you have any doubts about how to evacuate the building if your home is affected by a fire.

If you have more general concerns or questions about fire safety, then please email to barbican.estate@cityoflondon.gov.uk stating the subject 'Fire Safety'.

You will receive an acknowledgement within two working days. An officer will be allocated to look into your concerns and you will receive a full response as early as possible.

Q How often does the City of London Corporation carry out fire checks on its residential blocks?

A Previously, our policy has been to commission independent fire risk assessments every three years, and to have these reviewed annually, by trained staff. However, we have now decided to have new fire risk assessments done by independent specialists every year. Frankham Risk Management Services have been commissioned to carry out new risk assessments on all our blocks, starting in the Autumn.

All Estate Managers and Estate Officers are trained in fire risk management and carry out monthly and weekly checks to address any hazards that emerge during the year. All our cleaners have been trained to identify potential fire risk and are expected to report anything they see as part of their day to day duties.

Q Can I see the most recent Fire Risk Assessment for my block?

A Yes. Links to fire risk assessments for each of the City's residential blocks can be found on the City of London website, on the page for the estate:

<https://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/services/housing/Pages/Housing-Fire-Safety-.aspx>

If you do not have internet access, please ask your House Officer to print a copy for you. Any questions received regarding the Fire Risk Assessments are being sent to our independent specialists Frankham Risk Management Services.

Q How can I keep up to date with information about fire safety on the estate?

A New pages are being set up on the City Corporation's website and can be found at www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/housingfiresafety. All information will be posted there and updated regularly. These FAQs will be updated regularly. There will also be links to other useful information.

Anyone who does not have internet access can contact their House Officers to print off any updates for them.

As projects to improve the fire measures of buildings are progressed, updates on these will be included in our weekly email bulletins. If there are developments that all residents must be made aware of, we will write to all households. But, if you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact us.

Q What should we do if a fire breaks out in our building? The current advice is confusing and we don't know whether we should evacuate or stay put.

A The advice given by the London Fire Brigade is that people are usually safer staying in their home BUT that they should leave if fire or smoke is affecting their property and it is safe for them to do so. This is the advice we give in all our literature.

The advice we, and the Fire Service give **if there is a fire in your property** is:

- alert everyone in your property
- leave, shutting all doors, without locking them
- if possible, alert neighbouring properties
- leave the building
- call 999 and wait for the fire service to attend. If safe to do so, wait by the entrance of the building to meet the fire service and to prevent anyone else entering the building.

Q How do we get informed in the event of a fire?

A Fires occasionally happen in residential premises. Neighbouring properties are rarely required to be informed as the incident is concluded swiftly, without the need of others to be alerted. Residents are protected in their property by the fire protection afforded by the buildings structural design. In the highly unlikely situation of having to evacuate a whole building, the fire brigade or the police would, if necessary go floor by floor and knock on doors.

Q Does everyone know how to get out of the building if they need to?

A Fire escape routes are clearly signposted and emergency lighting is regularly checked. We do advise all households to make themselves familiar with fire escape routes. If you are unsure of yours, then please contact your House Officer and someone will visit you to show you.

Q Since there is no fire alarm, how will the Fire Brigade inform us should we need to be evacuated?

A The Fire Brigade have confirmed that in the highly unlikely situation of having to evacuate a whole building, they would, if necessary go floor by floor and knock on doors.

Q Is the City Corporation proposing to introduce fire drills for residents across its estates?

A The fire service does not recommend carrying out fire drills on estates as this is extremely difficult to manage. Instead, we are offering to make a home visit to any household requesting it and to show residents their escape route.

Q What do you do to identify and help elderly and vulnerable people in an emergency?

A We are proactive in trying to identify all residents who may need help in an emergency situation, and we make their details available to the emergency services. We also work very closely with our social services colleagues, to share information and to make sure people are supported.

However, it is difficult for us to know all the people who live on our estates, especially in leasehold and privately let properties. If you have anyone in your household who might need extra help in an emergency, then please let us know straight away so that we can update our records and let the emergency services know. This is vital.

Q Does the fire service have access to information about vulnerable people?

A Yes. Every block has a fire box, accessible only to the emergency services, and this contains information on flats where there may be people needing greater support. This is updated whenever we are made aware of a change, by the resident, their family, Adult Social Care Team, the City Police or any other agency.

Q The emergency services all rely on postcodes to reach us and this can be problematic considering the inaccuracies of postcodes in our part of the city. What is the position?

A The emergency services do not rely on post codes. When speaking to the call handler, who could be in any part of the UK; you will be asked for a postal address with the road where the incident is in and main road intersecting this. It is then looked up on a digital map to confirm. However, the BEO are reviewing the original information in the Residents Information Pack and information cards whilst liaising with the Emergency Services to offer clear guidance to you and your Estate Concierge in the Car Park Offices.

Q Should residents keep fire extinguishers in their kitchens?

A We do not advise this as different types of extinguishers are needed for different fires. Fire blankets are also not recommended. We do advise that heat detectors be fitted in kitchens and smoke detectors in halls. The London Fire Brigade offer free home safety visits which we encourage residents to take up. You can contact them directly: <http://www.london-fire.gov.uk/FireSafetyRegulationTeams.asp>

Q There are fire extinguishers in the communal areas, will we receive training in how to use a fire extinguisher?

A At this time, the City is not planning to provide fire extinguisher training for all residents.

Q How fire resistant are our front doors and is the City Corporation going to replace them?

A Most of the doors on our properties are original, and have around 20 minutes resistance to fire. We are carrying out a feasibility study to survey all doors and plan a programme to replace all those which have resistance of under 30 minutes. Priority will be given to doors in tower blocks and we will inform residents as soon as we know the extent of the programme and when it will start.

Q Do you plan to install sprinkler systems?

A This is something we are investigating. We need to find out exactly what is possible for each building, and what the cost would be. We are getting this information and expect to be able to come back to residents in September.

Q What about fire detection and smoke ventilation in communal areas?

A Again, we are investigating this, as we need to make sure that anything installed is tamper-proof and does not result in false call-outs for the fire service. We will report back to residents in September.

Q Shouldn't every home have a smoke alarm?

A All City Corporation tenants' homes are currently part of a programme of electrical testing and rewiring. As part of that programme, hard-wired fire detectors are being installed.

The London Fire Brigade advises that all flats should have a working smoke alarm. They can help with this – more information can be found at <http://www.london-fire.gov.uk/SafetyAtHome.asp> or by calling **0800 028 4428**.

Q Will leaseholders be expected to pay for the improvements and changes made as a result of improved fire safety recommendations?

A Our current policy is that leaseholders are charged for any work for which they are liable. We will know more about charges for the fire safety works when we have completed our feasibility studies and will update residents.

Q Can you clarify the position regarding front and rear balconies which are sometimes blocked? How often are they checked? Also, are fire exits checked?

A All balconies are checked annually. It may be that as part of future Fire Risk Assessments this frequency may be increased. Fire exit stairs are checked monthly and, where there are flats, daily by the front-line Estate Team.

Specific FAQs – All flats

Q We know that residents have refurbished kitchens and may have compromised asbestos panels in the common ducts. How are alterations inspected?

A Alterations are subject to Building Control inspections and approval.

Q Is there any fire risk from the underfloor heating system which is very old now?

A All the cables are encapsulated in the floor screed so there is no risk.

Q Is there any fire risk from wooden flooring?

A There are no additional risks from having wooden flooring. The building regulations offer designs for the use of concrete and wooden flooring to ensure the correct fire resistance is achieved to protect the occupants.

Q The electricity supplies in the building are old and many modifications will have been made inside people's flats. Do they need thorough inspection?

A The buildings supply although old, is in excellent condition. For any alterations within your flat, you should ensure that your work is carried out by a Competent Electrician and comply with Building Regulations. They are also subject to inspection.

Q What is the fire proof integrity of the building and fire risks from combustible items in terms of the Plumbers Duct Access (PDAs) and other service ducts – they connect one floor to another, are they a potential fire risk?

A The BEO is seeking further advice from the District Surveyor on this and will advise further. Our current Fire Risk Assessments have not highlighted this as a risk.

Q What is the fire proof integrity of the internal walls and doors inside the flats and the inside of exterior walls?

A The property if unaltered unless by licence, granted by The City and will have satisfied the Building Regulation at the time. Some sub dividing walls, do not have the same fire resistance as external walls i.e. bathrooms where persons do not spend much time in are normally of a reduced specification in all buildings. Internal doors are normally of light weight construction. We recommend all properties have working fire alarms to warn occupants. The properties fire protection is gained from the external walls and doors creating fire resistant cells.

Q What should I do if I am an elderly/vulnerable person and require additional assistance in the event of a fire (are there any refuge points on the Barbican Estate)?

A In the first instance contact your House Officer, if you have not already done so, so that we can update our records. Furthermore, contact the London Fire Brigade for a Home Visit. You can contact them directly:

<http://www.london-fire.gov.uk/FireSafetyRegulationTeams.asp>

In the event of an emergency please take directions from the London Fire Brigade.

Q What should I do if the balcony paving tiles on the fire escape route are broken?

A Please report them to your House Officer or the Repairs Reporting Line who will have an order raised for their replacement.

Q What is being done regarding items left in the communal parts of the baggage store areas?

A The Estate Cleaners have been asked to report these items during their regular checks.

Specific FAQs – Tower blocks

Q I am concerned that, during redecorations, the fire exit doors (tower flats from dining area) may have been painted shut. Will the fire risk assessment look at this?

A Yes and if you have any specific concerns about your fire exit doors please contact your House Officer.

Q Could tower residents access the roofs in an emergency?

A No. The advice from the London Fire Brigade is to evacuate downwards not upwards.

Q What do I need to check with my dining room external fire door?

A There is a key hole next to the break glass. In an emergency you would break the glass. The key is there so that the door can be checked. Keys are available to sign out from BEO reception. Should you have any problems opening this door (which you may if the door has not been opened for a long time) then please contact your House Officer who will have an order raised for this door to be opened by our contractors for you.

Q Is there any mechanism to remove smoke from the fire stairs.

A The top of the staircase is open to the elements with louvers in the doors.

Specific FAQs – Frobisher Crescent

Q I live in a flat close to the Barbican Arts Centre. What happens if there is a fire there – how would we know?

A The Barbican Arts Centre is a commercial public building and has a fire alarm system.

What can you do?

We do advise all households to make themselves familiar with their fire escape routes. If you are unsure of yours, then please contact your House Officer and someone will visit you to show you.

If you have anyone in your household who might need extra help in an emergency, then please let us know straight away so that we can update our records and let the emergency services know. This is vital.

The London Fire Brigade offer free home safety visits which we encourage residents to take up. You can contact them directly: <http://www.london-fire.gov.uk/FireSafetyRegulationTeams.asp>

The London Fire Brigade advises that all flats should have a working smoke alarm. They can help with this – more information can be found at <http://www.london-fire.gov.uk/SafetyAtHome.asp> or by calling **0800 028 4428**.

Ensure that you co-operate with our inspection regime of the fire exit stairs, corridors, balconies, store and car park areas in maintaining all of these areas clear for access. It may be that as part of future Fire Risk Assessments our policy in these areas may change.

Contact the Repairs Reporting Line on barbicanrepairs@cityoflondon.gov.uk or 020 7029 3909 to get your ventilation cleaned – we recommend that this is done annually.

Please note that we have logged many questions about Fire Safety and we will be updating our FAQs as soon as we can.