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## **The Voice of Leaseholders**

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# **RESIDENTS' GROUP BACK NEW FIRE SAFETY GUIDELINES FOR FLATS**

Following pressure from the FPRA and others new guidance is currently being drawn up to improve fire safety in blocks of flats.

The Federation of Private Residents Association along with a variety of industry professionals are working with The Local Government Group who have been commissioned to put together specialist advice which will be used for social and private landlords, risk assessors, fire officers and others in the housing sector.

The new guidance will run alongside existing advice on housing fire safety published in 2008. As well as dealing with new-build, repair and refurbishment in flats, it will also tackle issues surrounding vandalism.

Federation Chairman Bob Smytherman said:

“Clear, comprehensive and unambiguous fire safety guidance is desperately needed for those of us responsible for fire safety in blocks of flats

The existing advice covers most types of property, but it was never sufficient for common parts of blocks of flats and some landlords and residential management companies which are often run by volunteer Directors are unsure of their legal responsibilities in such buildings. This was also compounded by fire risk

assessors being unclear about the level of investigation required when carrying out risk assessments, which often led to confusion over the need for things like fire fighting equipment, alarm systems and emergency lighting in the common ways.

These extra guidelines should resolve these issues and help make sure everyone involved in the housing sector knows exactly what they have to do so residents are made as safe as possible without being burdened with increased bureaucracy or inflated services charges as unscrupulous managing agents and landlords opt for expensive and unnecessary fire alarm systems."

ENDS

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NOTES TO EDITORS

"Housing – fire safety: guidance on fire safety provisions in certain types of existing housing" was published in 2008 by Local Authorities Coordinators of Regulatory Services, now Local Government Regulation, in partnership with the Chief Fire Officers Association and the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health. The guidance was designed to help regulators and landlords understand the requirements of the Housing Act 2004 and the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 which was approved by Parliament on 7 June 2005, and came in to law from 1st October 2006.

The main effect of the changes was to move towards greater emphasis on fire prevention in all non-domestic premises, including communal parts of blocks of flats but NOT the flats themselves. Fire certificates were abolished and have no legal status.

Responsibility for complying with the Fire Safety Order rest with the 'responsible persons'.

In many blocks this will probably be the Company Directors, or any other person who may have control of the communal parts of the premises. If there is more than one responsible person, all must take all reasonable steps to work with each other.

The responsible person has to carry out a fire risk assessment, which must focus on the safety in case of fire of all 'relevant persons'. In most blocks this will be residents and visitors to the building. It should pay particular attention to those at special risk, such as the disabled and those with special needs, and must include consideration of any dangerous substance likely to be on the premises. Your fire risk assessment will help you identify risks that can be removed or reduced and to decide the nature and extent of the general fire precautions you need to take to protect people against the fire risks that remain, currently ONLY if a block employs five or more people must you record any significant findings of the assessment, although we strongly recommend to our members to keep records of any assessments that are made.

The new guidelines, commissioned and funded by the Department for Communities and Local Government, are expected to be published in July. Local Government Improvement and Development will lead on the sector-led project and Colin Todd Associates will consult. The Electricity Safety Council will also contribute financially. Once ready the document will be made available as a free internet download.

Local Government Improvement and Development and Local Government Regulation are parts of the Local Government Group.

The FPRA is a non-political, not-for-profit advice, support and lobbying organisation for our members who include private residential leaseholders, tenants' and residents' associations and residential management companies as well as those companies where the leaseholders together own the freehold of their own residential block.

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