



**Northern Ireland  
Fire & Rescue Service**

# **FIRE SAFETY LEGISLATION ADVICE NOTE 007**

## **Fire Safety Advice for People Living in Flats**

Version 1 - 19 September 2024

**The purpose of this advice note is to provide clarity for people living in flats about fire alarm systems and what to do in the event of a fire.**

### **Overview**

If you live in a flat, it is important that you understand the evacuation strategy for your building and the configuration of any fire alarm system installed. The strategy will be different in different types of building. Early warning of fire is an essential component to ensure that residents can evacuate safely from their flats in a fire. If you see signs of a fire, call 999 immediately.

The strategy will normally be either a **stay put strategy** or an **immediate evacuation strategy**.

A **stay put strategy** means that if a fire alarm sounds outside of your flat, you are generally safer to remain in your flat, keep doors closed and move towards an open window. If you wish to leave, check it is safe to do so, close all doors behind you and use the staircase.

An **immediate evacuation strategy** means that if a fire alarm sounds anywhere in the building, you should leave immediately, close all doors behind you and use the staircase.

You can check with the manager of your premises what the strategy is for your building.

## **Fire Alarms in Flats**

Each flat will be fitted with an independent fire alarm system. When an alarm sounds within your flat, check for signs of a fire and if identified, leave immediately and call 999 to request the fire and rescue service.

## **Fire Alarms in Common Areas**

Purpose-built blocks of flats are not normally provided with communal fire alarm systems. This is because they are generally designed to support a stay put policy and it is unnecessary and undesirable for a fire alarm system to be provided. A communal fire detection and alarm system will inevitably lead to a proliferation of false alarms. This will lead to residents ignoring warnings of genuine fires and impose a burden on fire and rescue services.

Fire detection may be installed in common areas for other reasons such as to operate automatically opening vents to clear smoke from common areas. These generally will operate silently and may automatically alert an alarm receiving centre or a premises manager.

There are some occasions when fire alarm sounders may be installed in common areas such as in sheltered housing, or where a fire safety defect has been identified, or because the owner wishes to have a higher level of property protection. In these circumstances, the premises manager must set in place arrangements to investigate, silence and reset the system. The ability to manage a fire alarm system is rarely possible in a block of flats unless staffed at all times, such as by a concierge or caretaker.

If a block has a stay put strategy, but is already fitted with a common area fire alarm system, the premises manager should seek advice from a competent person, such as a fire risk assessor or fire safety specialist, as it may be appropriate to remove the system or change the evacuation strategy.

## Further Information & Guidance

Further information and guidance about this advice can be obtained from:

### Group Commander (Protection)

#### NIFRS Headquarters

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T 028 9266 4221

E [protection@nifrs.org](mailto:protection@nifrs.org)