



Warwickshire Fire & Rescue Service

Fire Precautions for Domestic Dwellings used for Childminding Activities

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 This guidance has been prepared with the objective of establishing a common basic standard of fire precautions for **domestic** dwellings used for childminding activities.

1.2 The guidance is relevant for persons who are considering applying for registration.

1.3 It is important that childminders 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.

1.4 **Additional Considerations for Overnight Care:** Fire risks are potentially greater at night when people are asleep. In addition to the detailed guidance in this note for domestic childminding premises offering daytime care, those offering overnight care need to ensure that:

- a) 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 may be necessary to link them together so that the operation of one actuates the alarm signal in them all.
- b) A bedtime routine is followed ensuring that gas and electrical appliances are turned off and that all smoking materials are safely extinguished.
- c) Sufficient adults are available to ensure a safe and efficient evacuation taking into account the need to assist or carry children.

2. ESCAPE ROUTES

2.1 Childminding 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

2.2 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 childminding 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.

2.3 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 childminding **are not** inner rooms without the adequate safeguards shown in Figure 1.

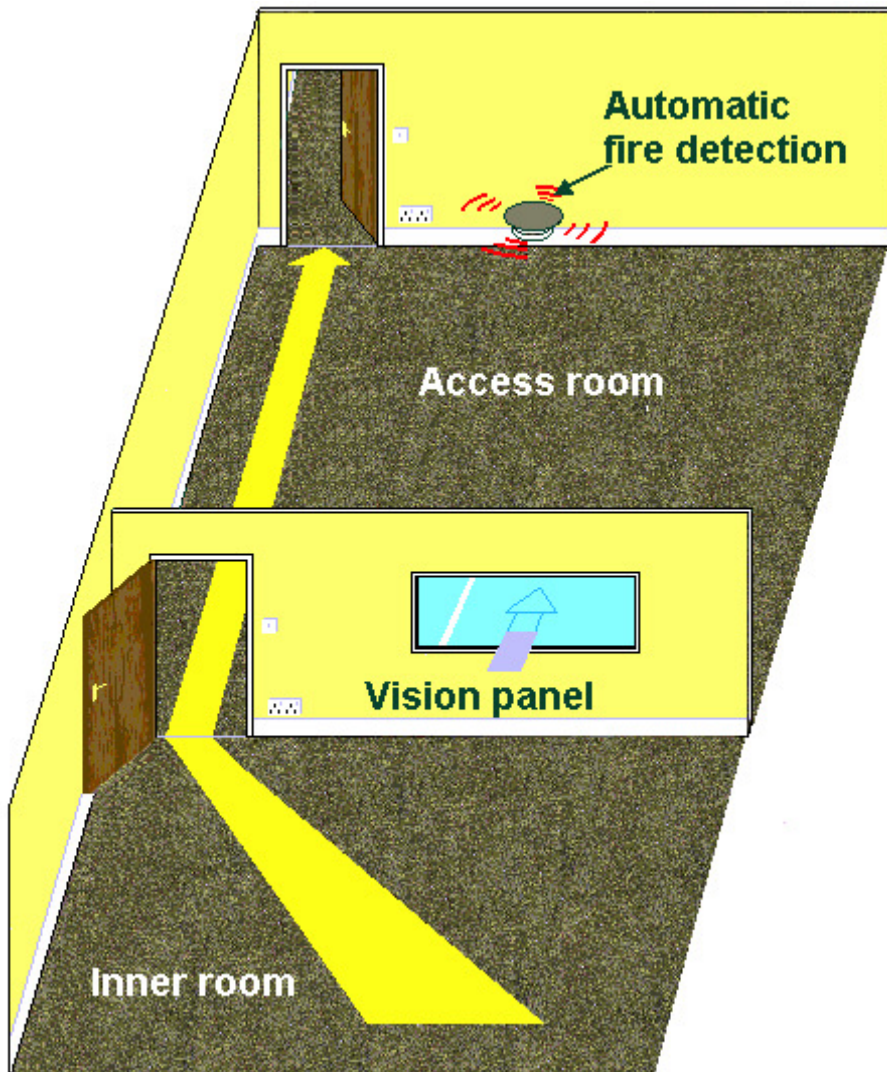


Figure 1: Inner Rooms

A room where the only escape route is through another room is termed an “inner 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 0.33m² 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 childminding 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.

3. SMOKE ALARMS (Domestic dwellings)

3.1 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 childminding 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 (i.e., 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 alarms 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.

3.2 Having regard to the statutory duty of Ofsted to inspect registered childminders' premises in every two years, 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.

3.3 Mains wired alarms are obviously to be preferred and will automatically be installed in newly constructed dwellings under the Building Regulations. Where mains wired smoke alarms are fitted, they should be permanently wired to a regularly used lighting circuit (when the alarm has a standby power supply) or a separate fused circuit at the distribution board (when the alarm has no standby power supply). They may operate at a low voltage via a mains transformer. Cable for the power supply to, and interconnection of, self-contained smoke alarms need have no special fire survival properties. The wiring installation should conform to the Institution of Electrical Engineering Wiring Regulations.

4. FIRE FIGHTING EQUIPMENT

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

5. REDUCING THE RISK FROM FIRE

5.1 Suitable Heating

Portable heaters, whether using liquefied petroleum gas, paraffin or electricity, are not regarded as safe forms of heating for childminding activities and their use should be prohibited except in exceptional circumstances (e.g. 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.

5.2 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

5.3 Smoking Materials

Under the Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework providers must ensure that children are in a smoke-free environment. Cigarettes, lighters and matches must always be kept out of sight, out of reach and preferably in a secure cabinet. In the event of concerns being found over a child's fascination with fire, please contact Warwickshire Fire Service who have a Safety Awareness Fire Education Programme (S.A.F.E.)

5.4 Foam Filled Furniture

Upholstered furniture should comply with the Furniture and Furnishings (Fire) (Safety) Regulations 1988 (as amended). 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.

5.5 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, i.e.

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

It is recommended that a periodic inspection is carried out every five years; this is an inspection and series of tests to make sure your electrical installation continue to conform to the national safety standard. A suitably qualified electrician, who will check the electrics against the national safety standard, should carry out all periodic inspections. The inspection should meet **BS 7671** – Requirements for Electrical Installations (IEE Wiring Regulations). A total of 850 regulations are checked in this test.

6. USEFUL CONTACTS

a) Electrical Safety Council: www.esc.org.uk

- ◆ **Telephone:** 0870 040 0561
- ◆ **Fax:** 0870 040 0560
- ◆ **Email:** enquiries@electricalsafetycouncil.org.uk
- ◆ **Address:** Unit 1.10, Canterbury Court, 1 - 3 Brixton Road, London, SW9 6DE

b) Ofsted Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk/childminders

Publications

Early Tears Foundation Stage is available by contacting the Department for Education:

- ◆ **Telephone:** 0370 000 2288
 - ◆ **Typetalk:** 18001 0370 000 2288
 - ◆ **Fax:** 01928 738248
- Phone lines are open 9:00am to 5:00pm, Monday to Friday
- ◆ **Address:** Department for Education, Castle View House, East Lane, Runcorn, Cheshire, WA7 2GJ

c) For further information on home fire safety, visit: www.firekills.direct.gov.uk

If you require any further guidance on the advice given in this Guidance Note please contact Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service on 01926 410800.

Guidance revised June 2011.