

## **Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service**

### **Fire Safety advice for Residential Care Providers and those managing 'Sleeping Risk' premises during the Covid 19 period.**

#### **FAO The Building Owner, Manager and Responsible Person(s) for Fire Safety**

As the UK follows Government guidance to respond to the Coronavirus Pandemic, Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service (NFRS), as the enforcing authority for fire safety, would like to take this opportunity to offer you support and guidance around your ongoing duties under the Regulatory Reform Fire Safety Order (RRO) to continue to ensure your residents, staff and premises remain safe from fire.

Fire safety should remain at the forefront of any business continuity planning arrangements during this period. Detailed guidance is available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/fire-safety-law-and-guidance-documents-for-business>

The following guidance focuses on matters which may impact on your Fire Risk Assessment as you adapt your processes and provisions due to Covid 19.

#### **Evacuation Strategy**

- A number of evacuation strategies are available and it is important that you fully understand the evacuation strategy you adopt for your premises.
- You must ensure that all staff; residents and visitors are familiar with the strategy you adopt (including all temporary / bank staff)
- Maintaining minimum staffing levels to undertake an evacuation is crucial.
- At no point should your staffing drop to a level where you wouldn't be able to safely deliver the evacuation plans you have put in place
- Where appropriate, Personal Emergency evacuation Plans PEEPs must continue to be conducted and reviewed.
- If you feel your minimum staffing arrangements to manage an evacuation can't be achieved, you should inform NFRS (see Support section below).

#### **Risk Assessment**

- It is important that, as changes are made to adapt to Covid 19, they are also considered in the context of your fire risk assessment and any significant hazards which arise are recorded (eg Introduction of oxygen use / storage)
- Where significant findings and hazards are identified, suitable and sufficient control measures must be put in place.

## **Fire Safety Systems, Testing & Maintenance**

- It is important that fire alarm, emergency lighting and other fire safety systems (eg smoke control systems, where fitted) are maintained in good working condition at all times through the continuation of your normal testing regimes
- If your system/s are due maintenance by a qualified engineer, but you want to limit the number of visitors to your premises at this time, you may choose to Fire Safety advice for Residential Care Providers and those managing 'Sleeping Risk' premises during the Covid 19 period. delay the attendance of the engineer. If you take this action you must record it as a significant finding in the fire risk assessment and highlight the importance of the regular tests you then undertake to ensure the system is functioning.
- There may still be occasions when engineers / contractors have to attend your site to maintain essential fire safety systems and you should plan ahead for this eventuality within your Business Continuity arrangements.
- If you are uncertain whether maintenance schedules can be safely extended for your system/s you should contact a qualified fire safety system engineer.

## **Fire Alarm Activation & Emergency Procedures**

If a fire does occur in your premises you must ensure the Fire Service is called at the earliest opportunity via 999 and inform the operator that an evacuation is in progress.

You may wish to consider adopting the following process to reduce disruption, maintain fire safety and minimise the need for external persons (in this case Firefighters) to enter your premises at a time when you may be 'shielding' residents from preventable exposure to potential Covid 19 transmission.

- If the fire alarm activates, commence your normal emergency procedures
- Suitably trained staff should investigate the source of the alarm seeking to establish if it is a fire or a false alarm.
- If, at any point during the investigation a fire is discovered or there is a smell of burning or smoke that cannot be accounted for, dial 999 and ask for the fire service immediately – stating that an evacuation is in progress.
- If, following the investigation, you are certain that there is no fire, and no suspicion of a fire, then the emergency procedures can be cancelled. Under these circumstances, do not call the fire service.
- The fire alarm system should be re-set by a competent member of staff and the fire alarm log book updated with a record of the event
- To prevent any unnecessary disruption, please ensure that any known problems causing false fire alarms are immediately corrected, so that there is a high degree of confidence that fire alarms that do occur are genuine. Further information can be found here - <https://www.northumberland.gov.uk/fire>

## **Support**

NFRS will support services and businesses during this difficult period. Qualified fire safety officers will continue to be available to provide advice and guidance on how to comply with fire safety law and, by so doing, keep residents, staff and premises safe from fire during the COVID-19 period, and beyond.

Please visit <https://www.northumberland.gov.uk/fire> for further fire safety information.  
If you need to contact us please e-mail [firesafety1@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:firesafety1@northumberland.gov.uk) and a fire safety officer will be in touch (please provide contact details).

**NORTHUMBERLAND FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE PROTECTION TEAM**