

FIRE – SAFETY AT HOME

The red fire extinguisher is so familiar in everyday life that we barely take any notice of it. We generally assume that if a fire breaks out someone will "know what to do" - and generally speaking that is true because the workplace and most public buildings are covered by a plethora of fire precaution regulations which demand risks to be assessed, fire fighting appliances to be readily available and personnel to be trained in fire safety. However the stark truth of the matter is that 70 per cent of people killed by fire die in private dwellings not in business premises or at leisure venues.

This statistic clearly underlines the need for safety precautions and preventative measures, to be employed in the home - just as assiduously as they are in the workplace. The truth is that the house is a dangerous place for both adults and children alike. And the risks, and therefore the need for safety measures, increase in blocks of flats, especially where there are communal areas.

The portable fire extinguisher is a vital piece of potentially life-saving equipment which we should choose with great care, learn how to use and properly maintain. [It is imperative that we use the right extinguisher appropriate to the type of fire. NEVER, for example use water on an electrical fire]. While it is generally acknowledged that no-one should risk personal injury to fight a fire, sometimes extinguishers are needed to protect escape routes.

Chubb Fire Ltd., the UK's leading fire protection company, provides the following advice on fire in the home:

- Alert everyone and get out immediately
- Do not risk personal injury to fight the fire - if in doubt, get out
- Do not stop to collect personal belongings
- Dial 999 and ask for the fire brigade . Wait in a safe place .
- Do not attempt to go back until the fire brigade say that it is safe
- If you are unsure about fire safety in your home contact the fire brigade

Other information published by Chubb Fire which is even more relevant to flat dwellers draws attention to the benefits of:

- Checking for and, if possible, eliminating fire risks
- Installing smoke alarms as well as fire extinguishers (plus a fire blanket for cooking-oil fires)
- Drawing up an evacuation plan, identifying escape routes and ensuring everyone knows the best way out for them by practicing regularly
- Agreeing who will be responsible for calling the fire brigade and making arrangements to help the elderly, disabled or young children.

The installation of fire extinguishers and fire blankets in communal areas not only helps to protect against possible acts of vandalism or freak accidents, but can be used for common good. You may have adequate fire protection in your flat, but what about your neighbours? A well placed fire extinguisher on the landing may mean that your neighbour who carelessly left a cigarette to smoulder between the cushions on his three-piece suite might prevent a blaze that could spread to your home too. And don't forget that smoke can be just as damaging as fire.

Stored pressure water, foam or multi-purpose dry powder extinguishers are expensive to buy but are available as part of an inclusive rental and service plan. Providing residents in the block know how to use them, they will offer peace of mind plus an effective answer to small fires. It may seem obvious, but giving people instructions in advance is far better than leaving it to the heat of the moment.

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This article was taken from Residentsline Newsletter No 2, published in Spring 2001.

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Just remember the simple acronym **PASS**:

- P** - Pull the pin
- A** - Aim the extinguisher nozzle at the base of the flame
- S** - Squeeze the trigger while holding the extinguisher upright
- S** - Swing the extinguisher from side to side covering the area of the fire with the extinguishing agent.

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