

Fire Safety Standards Required for Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs)

This document sets out the fire safety standards required for Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs). It explains what landlords and managing agents must do to meet legal fire safety duties, including installing smoke and heat detectors, fitting fire doors and ensuring safe escape routes. The guidance applies to different types of HMOs depending on the number of storeys and occupants and helps landlords and agents understand how to keep tenants safe and comply with housing regulations.

Basic Safety Features in all HMOs

Feature	Requirement
Walls / Partitions on the escape route	Walls and partitions on an escape route must be of 30-minute fire-resisting construction. Materials such as brick, tile, and gypsum typically offer this level of protection.
Separation Between Units	Walls and floors should be of sound, traditional construction, offering a minimum of 30 minutes' fire protection.
Properties with Basements / Lower Ground Floors	A 30-minute separation from the rest of the property is required, including a 30-minute fire door at the top or bottom of the stairs and separation between the basement ceiling and the ground floor.
Emergency Lighting	Required if the means of escape has no borrowed light and/or the escape route is long or complex. Installations should comply with BS 5266-1:2016.
Fire Blanket	Fire safety measures are required in all shared kitchens and kitchenettes.
Fire Extinguishers	Fire extinguishers should only be present if serviced annually, tenants are trained, and staff work or sleep at the property.
Security Locks	Any security lock provided should have a thumb-turn or be capable of being immediately opened without the use of a key.
Items in Means of Escape	Means of escape should be maintained free of clutter or ignition sources.
Key, Card or Coin Meters	Uninterruptible power supply is required; interruptions to the fire alarm power source are not permitted.
Cupboards in Means of Escape	Storage cupboards in protected routes should not contain combustible items unless they are 30-minute fire resisting with an interlinked detector.

Expected Fire Safety Features – 1–2 Storey HMO with 3–6 Occupants
Number of Storeys: 1–2

Number of Occupants: 3–6

Requirement	Shared House	Non-Shared House	Non-Shared House with Kitchenettes
Fire Alarm System	Grade D1: LD2 BS5839 Part 6:2019	Grade D1 or Grade A depending on occupancy	Grade D1 or Grade A depending on occupancy
Detection	Smoke detectors to halls/landings, lounge and heat detector to kitchen.	Smoke detectors to halls/landings, bedrooms, lounge and heat detector to kitchen.	Smoke detectors to halls/landings and lounge. Heat detectors to kitchen and all kitchenettes.
Fire Doors	Well-fitted bedroom doors permitted in some cases. Kitchens and certain escape route doors to be FD30S.	All bedroom, kitchen and lounge doors should be FD30S.	All bedroom, kitchen and lounge doors should be FD30S.

Expected Fire Safety Features – 3–4 Storey HMO with 3–9 Occupants

Number of Storeys: 3–4

Number of Occupants: 3–9

Requirement	Shared House	Non-Shared House	Non-Shared House with Kitchenettes
Fire Alarm System	Grade D1: LD2 BS5839 Part 6:2019	Grade D1 or Grade A depending on occupancy	Grade D1 or Grade A depending on occupancy
Detection	Smoke detectors to halls/landings, lounge and heat detector to kitchen.	Smoke detectors to halls/landings, bedrooms, lounge and heat detector to kitchen.	Smoke detectors to halls/landings and lounge. Heat detectors to kitchen and all kitchenettes.
Fire Doors	Well-fitted bedroom doors permitted in some cases. Kitchens and certain escape route doors to be FD30S.	All bedroom, kitchen and lounge doors should be FD30S.	All bedroom, kitchen and lounge doors should be FD30S.

Expected Fire Safety Measures – All Storey Sizes with 10 or More Occupants

Number of Storeys: All storeys

Number of Occupants: 10+

Requirement	Shared House	Non-Shared House	Non-Shared House with Kitchenettes
Fire Alarm System	Grade D1: LD2 BS5839 Part 6:2019	Grade D1 or Grade A depending on occupancy	Grade D1 or Grade A depending on occupancy
Detection	Smoke detectors to halls/landings, lounge and heat detector to kitchen.	Smoke detectors to halls/landings, bedrooms, lounge and heat detector to kitchen.	Smoke detectors to halls/landings and lounge. Heat detectors to kitchen and all kitchenettes.
Fire Doors	Well-fitted bedroom doors permitted in some cases. Kitchens and certain escape route doors to be FD30S.	All bedroom, kitchen and lounge doors should be FD30S.	All bedroom, kitchen and lounge doors should be FD30S.

Glossary of Terms

Phrase or System	Explanation
Fire (Escape) Egress Windows	Escape windows are required in certain layouts where rooms do not open onto a protected escape route. Minimum opening size is 450mm x 450mm with sill height not more than 1100mm.
FD30S – Fire Door	FD30S fire doors resist fire for 30 minutes and include smoke seals, self-closing devices and compliant frames and hardware.
Hardwired Smoke Detection	Mains-powered smoke and heat detectors with battery backup. All detectors must be interlinked.
Grade D1	Mains-powered, interlinked detectors with tamper-proof battery backup.
Grade A	Panel-based system with detectors, sounders, and manual call points.
Means of Escape	Protected routes that allow safe exit during a fire. Must be fire resisting and free from obstruction.
Emergency Lighting	Lighting that activates automatically during a power failure to assist evacuation.
Shared House	Accommodation is occupied by a single household group or students from the same university.
Installation Reports	Formal reports confirming smoke detection systems are correctly installed to British Standards.

Detection System Testing

Type of System	Who Tests It	How Often
Grade D1 (interlinked mains alarms)	Landlord or tenant	Weekly or monthly as a minimum
Grade A (panel system)	Qualified electrical engineer	Every 6 months
Emergency lighting	Landlord or agent	Monthly visual check and annual full test

Fire Risk Assessment

A Fire Risk Assessment (FRA) is a legal requirement for landlords of HMOs. It identifies fire hazards, assesses risk, evaluates fire safety measures and recommends improvements.

Area	What to Check
Fire hazard	Electricals, cooking, smoking, heating, storage
Escape routes	Clear, protected, signed, and easy to use
Detection systems	Smoke/heat alarms, interlinked, working
Fire doors	Correct type, fitted properly, self-closing
Firefighting equipment	If present, must be serviced and tenants trained
Emergency plan	Clear instructions for tenants on what to do

Review annually and update if the layout changes, the number of occupants changes, or there is a fire or near miss.

Legally Required For

Property Type	FRA Required?	Why
Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) of all sizes	Yes	Required under fire safety legislation.
Flats with communal areas	Yes	Must cover shared corridors, staircases and entrances.
Hostels, B&Bs and temporary accommodation	Yes	Higher risk due to occupancy turnover and shared spaces.
Mixed-use buildings (e.g. shop + flats)	Yes	Must cover both residential and commercial areas.

Competent Person Requirements

- Understand fire safety legislation and relevant guidance.
- Have practical experience in fire safety systems or risk assessments.
- Be able to identify hazards and recommend appropriate safety measures.
- Be qualified or certified where necessary.