

# Housing Health & Safety Rating System (HHSRS)

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Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) is the method used by local authorities to assess housing conditions. The Housing Act 2004 Part 1 establishes the HHSRS as the current statutory assessment criterion for housing and it is based on the principle that:

- any residential premises should provide a safe and healthy environment for any potential occupier or visitor.

The system applies to all dwellings including owner occupied, privately rented and council and housing association dwellings. We are required to keep housing conditions in privately owned property under review and also have a duty to inspect a property where we have reason to believe that it is appropriate to determine the presence of health and safety hazards.

## Hazards

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A hazard is any risk of harm to the health or safety of an actual or potential occupier that arises from a deficiency. The system is concerned with disease, infirmity and physical injury, and includes all mental disorder and distress.

There are 29 hazards which need to be considered and these have been divided into four groupings: physiological, psychological, protection against Infection and protection against accidents.

The hazards most likely to exist in all types of dwellings are:

- Damp and mould growth
- Excess cold
- Crowding and space
- Entry by intruders
- Falling on level surfaces etc
- Falling on stairs etc
- Fire.

## Fire

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The most vulnerable age group is all persons aged 60 years or over. There are approximately 70,000 fires each year reported to the fire authorities, but it is considered that only about 20% of fires are reported. It has been estimated that fires occur in about 3% of total dwellings every year. In 2005 there were 300 deaths, with most deaths associated with being overcome by smoke and fumes.

The presence or absence of a fire detection and alarm system affects the level of harm suffered. The death rate from dwellings with alarms is less than half of that for non-alarmed dwellings.

The HHSRS Operating Guidance from the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) states that properly working alarms connected to smoke or heat detectors are probably most effective at saving lives in the event of a fire. They provide early warning to the occupants, allowing them to escape before they are overcome by fumes, or burned.

## Excess cold

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This is by far the most likely hazard to affect a dwelling. For example, the hazard score for a pre-1946 property will on average mean that a Category 1 hazard exists and action by local authorities is mandatory.

It is not hypothermia, but respiratory and circulatory diseases in the elderly which is responsible for most of these deaths.

The most vulnerable group is all persons aged 65 years and over. There are 40,000 excess winter deaths in the UK each year associated with the effects of cold.

British Standards states that a minimum standard of heating is a fixed space-heating appliance to each occupied room. It should be capable of efficiently maintaining the room at a minimum temperature of 18°C in sleeping rooms, and 21°C in living rooms, when the temperature outside is minus 1°C and it should be available at all times. The adequacy of loft insulation and cavity wall insulation is important and would be considered as part of any HHSRS assessment, as would significant draughts.

## Falling on stairs etc

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The most vulnerable group is all persons aged 60 years or over and men are more likely to die as an outcome of this hazard than women. Although physical injury is the most likely outcome overall, death may occur several weeks or months after the initial fall injury, due to cardio-respiratory illness, including heart attack, stroke and pneumonia.

Several factors can influence the likelihood of an accident, including the following:

- Accidents are nearly twice as likely on stairs which are straight steps with no winders or intermediate landings.
- Accidents are more likely when the pitch of stairs is more than 42°; the steeper the pitch, the worse the outcome.
- An accident is three times more likely to occur on stairs without carpet covering.
- The lack of any handrail doubles the likelihood of a fall, even if there is a wall to both sides of the stairs.

## Damp and mould growth

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The most vulnerable group is all persons aged 14 years or under. One in eight children suffers with asthma in the UK. The hazard covers the health effects from house dust mites and mould or fungal growths resulting from dampness and/or high humidity. It includes threats to mental health and social well-being.

The waste from house dust mites and mould spores are both potent airborne allergens and exposure to these over a prolonged period will cause sensitisation of susceptible individuals. Deaths from all forms of asthma in the UK are around 1,500 a year, of which around 60% have been attributed to dust mite allergy.

Good ventilation is normally achieved by opening windows. Current building requirements for new buildings require that in rooms such as kitchens and bathrooms, mechanical ventilation should be provided by ducting to the external air. In existing bathrooms or toilets which do not have windows, mechanical ventilation must be provided. Mechanical ventilation in bathrooms/WCs should achieve a minimum of six litres per second. The system is often linked to the light switch and should incorporate a minimum 15 minute over-run.

Ventilation to any room helps prevent condensation by dispersing water vapour generated by normal household activities. It helps to remove pollutants from within the accommodation and helps to control internal temperatures. Dwellings should be warm and dry with good ventilation. The dwelling should be free from rising and penetrating dampness.

## Contact details

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Contact Wiltshire Council Customer Services on **0300 456 0100** and ask for Private Sector Housing.