

Security and safety in your home – Information for council tenants

This factsheet contains guidance on a range of issues that may affect your security and safety in your own home.

Further detailed advice on these matters can be obtained from the housing management repairs service.

Fire safety advice

- Make sure all people in your property are made aware of an escape route, or plan, in the event of a fire.
- Always allow access for us to service your fitted smoke alarm.
- Keep matches away from children. If you do keep matches in your house, make sure they are in a place children cannot reach them.
- If you smoke, make sure all cigarettes and matches are put out properly and ensure you check ashtrays before retiring to bed.
- Do not leave pans on the cooker unattended, especially pans of oil.
- Avoid using bottled gas heaters and paraffin heaters (they are not allowed in buildings at all, which are over three storeys tall). If you do have to use these types of heater, follow the manufacturer's instructions. Store and dispose of gas bottles properly. Do not store flammable liquids in your property.
- Do not dry or air clothes near heaters, cookers or open fires. Make sure that open fires have fireguards.
- Switch off and pull the plug out of the socket of any electrical appliances that are not in use. Some appliances such as freezers are meant to be left on (see manufacturer's instructions).
- Close doors especially at bedtime, to prevent fire spreading.
- Keep passages and hallways clear of obstructions, flammable material or naked flame heating (e.g. gas or paraffin heaters)
- Do not store rubbish or belongings below the stairs.

What to do if there is a fire:

- Try to be calm and don't panic.
- Get everyone out as quickly as possible, closing doors as you leave to prevent the spread of fire.
- Do not use the lift under any circumstances.
- Call the fire brigade (999) from somewhere safe to do so (e.g. a neighbour's house, public phone or shop). Do not re-enter the house for any reason until you are told it is safe to do so by the fire brigade.
- Remember even if your "pay as you go" mobile phone has run out of credit it will still allow you to call 999.

If you become trapped in your home by a fire you should:

- Close the door to the room you are in.
- Try to seal any gaps under the door with clothes or a towel, to stop smoke entering.
- Where possible cover your face to prevent inhaling the smoke.
- Shout for help out of the window asking passers-by to call the fire brigade.
- Remember that if you live in a flat or maisonette and a fire breaks out in another part of the building it should be safe to stay in your home. Many purpose built blocks have fire safety measures built into them. However if your home is affected by heat or smoke follow the above advice "What to do if there is a fire". In both cases, call the fire brigade when it is safe to do so.

Gas safety

Under law, gas appliances must be fitted by a suitably qualified person, who is a registered member of 'Gas Safe'. Tenants must ask permission from the council before installing any gas appliances and must agree to the appliance being inspected as part of the council's servicing contract.

- Know where your gas meter is located and ensure that you have an access key.
- If you have a Calor gas heater do not put it in a hallway or corridor.
- If you have an open flue appliance, such as a gas fire with a back burner, installed in your living room (these appliances will never be installed in bedrooms, bathrooms or garages), then you should not allow anyone to sleep in that room.

GAS SAFE General enquiries - 0800 408 5500
 Emergencies - 0800 111 999
 Email - enquiries@gassaferegister.co.uk

BRITISH GAS Number for Wiltshire Council tenants - 01722 413344

If you smell gas in your home you must:

- Turn off the gas at the meter or emergency control valve
- Put out all naked flames including any cigarettes
- Open all windows and doors.
- Do not operate any electrical appliances by turning them on or off (including door bells and light switches).
- Call the national gas emergency number on freephone 0800 111 999.
- Contact Wiltshire Council repairs on 0300 456 0117. Any calls outside of office hours will be diverted to the out of hours service.

The council's responsibilities

- Wiltshire Council has a legal responsibility to make sure that any gas appliances it supplies are safe. It therefore needs to service all of its gas appliances at least once a year. By law the contractor should give you a copy of the Landlords Gas Safety Certificate when your appliances are checked. Our contractors will carry out any necessary repairs to your appliance.

- We will repair any gas appliance supplied by the council. If you have a gas appliance that is not working, switch it off and contact the repairs service. Do not try to mend it yourself or get a friend to mend it.

Your responsibilities

- You must allow us access to your house or flat to service and repair any of the gas appliances supplied by us. We will force access, using legal means, if you do not give us access for gas servicing and your gas supply will be disconnected. The cost of this will be charged to you.
- You must not block up any ventilation or airbricks or allow plants to do so.

Electrical safety

- Know where your meter is located and ensure you have an access key.
- Switch off any appliances when not in use and pull out any plugs.
- Never take electrical appliances into the bathroom.
- Do not overload sockets.
- Do not touch electrical appliances with wet hands.
- Get to know your fuse board and how it works.
- Report all broken switches, plugs and light fittings or any exposed wiring to the repairs service.
- Keep sockets safe from children by fitting socket covers.

Heating and hot water

Communal heating or hot water supplies:

- Some council properties have a communal heating and/or hot water supply. If you are not sure please contact us. The council will carry out any repairs to these communal systems. Please remember some communal heating systems are turned off during the summer months.
- You are advised to keep your own electric heater for emergencies.
- If you are elderly, disabled, or have a baby and your heating has broken down during the winter months (1 October to 30 April), we can provide you with a temporary heater until we carry out the repair.

Individual heating and hot water systems:

- If you are unsure how to operate your heating and hot water system please contact us.
- If your heating or hot water stops working, please check that your gas or electricity meter has not run out of credit before you report the breakdown.
- If you are elderly, disabled, or have a baby and your heating has broken down during the winter months (1 October to 30 April), we can provide you with a temporary heater until we carry out the repair.

Water supplies

Stopcocks

All tenants should know where their mains stopcock is located in case of a major leak. It is usually located under the kitchen sink or near the front door. If you cannot find it or are unsure, please contact us.

There are also other stopcocks/ servicing valves in your house and you should be familiar with what they do in case of emergencies. Once a year, stopcocks and servicing valves should be turned once and then back again to stop them seizing up.

Frozen pipes

Winter weather can bring problems for all householders. Here are some simple steps you can take to protect your property from frozen or burst pipes.

Before winter sets in:

- Test your mains stopcock.
- Check you do not have any dripping taps and replace the tap washers as appropriate.
- Check that any pipes near outside walls and external taps are lagged.

If you are away from home during the winter period:

- Turn off the stopcock.
- Turn on the bath/sink cold-water taps.
- Empty the toilet cistern by flushing it.
- If you have central heating, leave it on a low or frost setting.

On returning home, make sure you turn off your bath / sink cold-water taps, before turning the stopcock back on. If you suspect a pipe has frozen please contact the repairs service.

Burst pipes

If you have a burst pipe you should:

- Turn off the electricity at the mains switch on the fuse board (as long as there is no water near your mains switch). The fuse board or box will usually be located near the front door or under the stairs.
- Turn off the stopcock.
- Turn off the central heating/hot water boiler.
- Put a container under any leak to try to catch the water, if you can.
- Contact the repairs service.

Overflow pipes

Overflow pipes remove excess water from your toilet cistern or heating/hot water system. These do not normally drip unless there is something not working properly. Therefore please report any dripping overflow pipe to the repairs service.

If you have a loss of water supply

If you discover that your water supply has stopped for any reason, make sure all your taps are turned off (clockwise) and inform the repairs service immediately.

Security

Crime reduction

If you would like advice concerning the security of your home there are crime reduction officers at your local police station. They will be able to give advice over the telephone and can visit you in your own home. The Crime Reduction Office also has a range of useful leaflets which give general advice on all aspects of crime prevention in your home. Otherwise, you can look at their website at www.wiltshire.police.uk which has a more detailed range of advice and information.

Most burglaries are committed by opportunist thieves. Remember one quarter of all burglaries committed don't use force to enter a property. Think like a burglar – would there be an easy way to break into your home?

Windows and doors

- Make sure you close your doors and windows when you are not at home.
- Make sure the locks on your door and windows are in good condition and that you use them. For safety reasons, if you have window locks, hang the key near the window but out of sight of burglars.
- When you leave your home, even for a short time, make sure you lock your door properly (remember that on some modern doors, the key needs an extra turn, sometimes lifting the door handle up at the same time).
- Make sure that people cannot open your door or take a key out of the lock by putting their hand or a tool through the letterbox, fit a deflector to stop people doing this.

Keys

- Do not hide spare keys near your front door; instead leave a set with a trusted neighbour, relative or friend.
- Try not to have anything on your key ring that will identify where you live.
- If you do lose your keys it is wise to change the locks.
- The council will not pay for new locks or keys if you lose them. If the council have to gain entry to your property, you will usually have to pay for any repairs or new locks.

Answering the door – bogus callers

Always make sure you are satisfied with someone's identity before letting them into your home. Remember bogus callers can be men, women or children. They can be dressed smartly or be in uniform.

- Use your viewer or look through a window before opening the door.
- Always put a chain on before opening the door.
- If you are unsure, talk to the caller through the letterbox or a window.
- If a caller claims they are from the gas, electric, water board or the council, ask to see their name badge with his photo on it. Don't let him/her hurry you by telling you it is an emergency; all genuine callers will carry ID badges. Close the door and telephone their company using the number from your phone book (not from his ID card) to check he is genuine. If you are unsure, telephone a friend or neighbour to help you. Many utilities companies operate a password system that any caller from these companies will use when they call at your door. Telephone them to agree a password.
- Close your door if you have to get something for a caller, otherwise someone might sneak in behind you.

Sheds and gardens

- Make sure your shed has a secure lock on it. Use a battery powered alarm. These can be obtained from hardware stores.
- Always permanently mark, with your postcode and number of your house or flat, any large items of value. Marking them will make them of less value to burglars. Where possible secure these items with a chain. Remember your tools and ladders can help a burglar get into your home.

Lighting

- If you are out and likely to return after dark, leave a light on.
- Use timer switches on lamps (these can be bought from DIY stores) when you are out for longer periods.
- Consider using energy saving bulbs on inside and outside security lighting.
- Remember to call the Crime Reduction Team (Wiltshire Police) on 101, who will be able to discuss any concerns you have.

Going away?

- Do not leave notes or messages on your answer machine suggesting that you are going away.
- Arrange for a trusted neighbour to keep an eye on your home whilst you are away. Leave any contact details with this person.
- Ask them to open and close curtains, turn lights on and off and take mail out of the letterbox.
- Leave a battery-operated radio tuned into a "talking" station.
- Remember to cancel deliveries.

Contents insurance

As a general rule, the council will only be responsible for putting right things which are either its responsibility or went wrong through its negligence. An example where the council may not be responsible for putting things right, includes damage done when a neighbour allows water to penetrate through your ceiling.

For these reasons and the obvious risk of burglary, it is highly advisable to get contents insurance for your home. This may cost less than you think. Remember to read the information from any insurer carefully, as many will insist on certain conditions; which if ignored may invalidate any claim.

Wiltshire Council offers a tailored home contents insurance policy created specifically for its tenants and arranged by Aon through Aviva. You can get a minimum of £9,000 worth of protection for as little as 81p per week or a minimum of £6,000 for 54p per week if you are over the age of 60. The cost of insurance is payable weekly along with your rent. To request a quote or to arrange cover please speak to your neighbourhood officer.

Useful contacts

For information and advice on home security

Wiltshire Police.

Tel: 101

www.wiltshire.police.uk

For information and advice on fire safety

Wiltshire Fire & Rescue Service Headquarters, Manor House, Potterne, Devizes, Wiltshire, SN10 5PP

Tel: 01380 723601

Fax: 01380 727000

www.wiltsfire.gov.uk

Southern Electric Power Distribution

(Use this number to find out who supplies your electricity)

Tel: 0845 026 2554

National Grid

(Use this number to find out who supplies your gas)

Tel: 0870 608 1524

Contact us

Should you require a repair, or would like any further information about safety in your home, please contact the repairs service:

Telephone: 0300 456 0117 – option 2

Any calls outside of office hours will be diverted to the out of hours service

Email: housingrepairs@wiltshire.gov.uk

Write to us or visit us: Housing Management, Wiltshire Council
Council House, Bourne Hill, Salisbury SP1 3UZ

To contact your neighbourhood officer:

Telephone: 0300 456 0117 – option 4

Email: hsgmail@wiltshire.gov.uk

Write to us or visit us: Housing Management, Wiltshire Council
Council House, Bourne Hill, Salisbury SP1 3UZ

Information about Wiltshire Council services can be made available on request in other languages including BSL and formats such as **large print** and audio. Please contact the council by telephone **0300 456 0100**, by textphone 01225 712500, or email customerservices@wiltshire.gov.uk

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