

Scottish Government – Publication – Factsheet

Fire and smoke alarms: changes to the law

What homeowners need to know about changes in legislation relating to fire and smoke alarms.

The introduction of smoke and heat alarms in the tolerable standard is in recognition of the danger fire poses to the occupants of a house and is intended to reduce the risk of loss of life, injury and damage to property in the event of fire.

What types of housing will be covered by the new standard?

All homes will be covered by the new standard, as we believe that all homes should be safe for occupants regardless of tenure. It will be the property owner's responsibility to meet the new standard.

Why are you introducing this legislation now?

Following the tragic fire at Grenfell Tower in London, a Ministerial Working Group on Building and Fire Safety was established to review Scotland's building and fire safety regulatory frameworks. As part of this work, the group agreed that a consultation on fire and smoke alarms, originally planned for later this year, should be prioritised.

How many alarms are required to meet the standards?

The standard requires:

- One smoke alarm installed in the room most frequently used for general daytime living purposes.
- One smoke alarm in every circulation space on each storey, such as hallways and landings.
- One heat alarm installed in every kitchen.

All alarms should be ceiling mounted and interlinked. There is also a requirement for carbon monoxide detectors to be fitted where there is a carbon-fuelled appliance (such as boilers, fires (including open fires), heaters and stoves) or a flue.

I already have smoke alarms fitted in my home but they are not interlinked – do I need to change these to interlinked ones?

Yes – the requirement is to have all alarms interlinked. You may not hear the alarm closest to the fire but, by having an interlinked system, you will be alerted immediately.

There are lots of different types of alarms available – which ones should I get and where can I buy them?

You can install tamper proof long-life lithium battery alarms or mains-wired alarms. Mains-wired alarms are generally cheaper than the tamper proof long-life battery alarms; however, installation will need to be carried out by an electrician which will

be an additional cost to consider. Further detailed information on the requirements of the standard, including types of alarms, is set out in the [Tolerable Standard Guidance Chapters 16 and 17](#).

Alarms that meet the new standard, both tamper proof long-life lithium battery alarms and mains-wired alarms, are widely available in general hardware outlets and online.

How long do I have to comply?

The regulations come into force in February 2021, meaning homeowners and landlords have until then to comply. However, installing alarms at the earliest opportunity, will provide improved fire safety in your home.

I own my home – who will pay for these smoke alarms?

Any costs will be the responsibility of home owners and landlords. Mains-wired alarms are generally cheaper than the tamper-proof, long-life lithium battery alarms; however, installation will need to be carried out by an electrician which will be an additional cost to consider.

We estimate the cost to meet the new standard for an average home could be around £200, however, this will vary according to what you currently have in place and the alarms you choose to install.

Will it be necessary for tenements to have linked alarms between individual residences?

In a shared property such as a tenement or block of flats there is no requirement for different properties to be linked to each other.

How will you check that home owners comply?

Most home owners want to make their homes as safe as possible and compliance will also form part of any Home Report when you come to sell your home. Because this will be a minimum standard for safe houses, local authorities will be able to use their statutory powers to require owners to carry out work on substandard housing, although we would expect any intervention to be proportionate.

I am a tenant in a privately rented property – how do I make sure my landlord complies?

As the new standards for fire and smoke alarms extend those which currently apply in the Private Rented Sector PRS to housing of all tenures, your landlord should already be complying. The standard is enforced by the right of tenants to apply to the [First-tier Tribunal for Scotland \(Housing and Property Chamber\)](#), so if you believe that your landlord is failing to comply, you can apply to the First-tier Tribunal. Penalties for non-compliance would be determined by the Tribunal.

I am a tenant of a local authority or housing association – how do I make sure my landlord complies?

The responsibility for meeting the standard applies to building and home owners, so your landlord will be responsible for making sure that your home complies with the

standard, and the cost of meeting it. The new standard comes into force in February 2021, so your housing association should be making arrangements to ensure your home complies by this date. The standards will be monitored by the Scottish Housing Regulator, who may intervene as they deem appropriate for any non-compliance.

I have shared ownership of my home with a housing association. I have been told that I am responsible for making sure that my house complies with the standard, is this correct?

For shared ownership properties, as with other condition standards, responsibilities are set out in the occupancy agreement. However, in general, it is your responsibility as the proportion owner, rather than the registered social landlord, to meet the new fire and smoke alarm standard.

Can I still book a free Home Fire Safety Visit from the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS)?

SFRS will be happy to provide [Home Fire Safety Visits](#) to any home across Scotland. As part of the visit, staff can provide fire safety advice and guidance on what to do in an emergency.

Further information on the requirements of the new standard, and how to meet it, is available in the [Tolerable Standards Guidance](#).

I am having an extension added to my home. What types of alarms can I install?

While building standards recommend mains operated devices with battery back-up for building work in certain circumstances, tamper proof long-life lithium battery operated devices may be the preferred option for home owners. Section 10 of the Building (Scotland) Act 2003 provides a degree of flexibility when applying the building regulations to alterations, extensions and conversions, and it could be considered that a sealed long-life battery-operated system that is interlinked via radio frequency can provide an equal or in some cases, higher level of protection than is required through Building Regulations. Local authority building standards verifiers should take a pragmatic approach when applying the non-mandatory guidance to alterations, extensions and conversions, as contained in the technical handbooks.