All Things Smoke And Fire

SIMPLY YOUR ONE STOP SOLUTION

Landlords with buildings that have 2 or more dwellings please read.

From the end of January 2023 you are legally required to ensure your multi-occupancy buildings are compliant with regards fire doors and the information issued to your tenants regarding fire doors and other elements of Smoke & Fire prevention and management in those buildings now if they be of any height.

Please take a few minutes to read the below

The Fire Safety (England) Regulations 2022 will make it a legal requirement from 23 January 2023 for responsible persons for all multi-occupied residential buildings in England with storeys over 11 metres in height to:

- undertake quarterly checks of all fire doors (including self-closing devices) in the common parts

- undertake – on a best endeavour basis – annual checks of all flat entrance doors (including self-closing devices) that lead onto a building's common parts.

The regulations will also require responsible persons to provide to residents of all multi-occupied residential buildings with two or more sets of domestic premises (that have common parts) information on the importance of fire doors to a building's fire safety.

Why is this happening.

The Grenfell Tower Inquiry in the Phase 1 report noted that "Fire doors play an essential role in preventing or inhibiting the spread of smoke and toxic gases and in preserving the effective compartmentation of buildings."

The Inquiry noted that the fire doors in Grenfell Tower did not, through damage and/or disrepair, act in the way that they should so that they prevent smoke and gases from spreading.

The Inquiry recommended (Recommendations 33.29 (a) and (b)) that the owner and manager of every residential building containing separate dwellings carry out an urgent inspection of all fire doors to ensure compliance with current legislative standards and that regular (no less than every three months) checks be carried out to ensure all fire doors are fitted with an effective self-closing device which is in working order.

In addition, the Inquiry recommended (Recommendation 33.30) that all those who have responsibility for the condition of the entrance doors to individual flats in high-rise residential buildings (with unsafe cladding) be required by law to ensure these doors comply with current standards.

Prior to the Fire Safety Act 2021, flat entrance doors in multi-occupied residential buildings may not have been routinely considered as part of the fire risk assessment process. The Fire Safety Act 2021 has

removed the legal ambiguity and confirms that flat entrance doors are in scope of the Fire Safety Order.

The regulations will require responsible persons to undertake best endeavour annual checks of flat entrance doors and quarterly checks of communal doors in multioccupied residential buildings above 11m.

Information on the importance of fire doors to a building's fire safety will help to deepen residents' understanding of their role in keeping their building safe and encourage them to allow responsible persons access to check their flat entrance doors.

Current situation

The checks required under the regulations do not replace the existing duty under the Fire Safety Order for the responsible person to put in place general fire precautions and their duties under Article 17 of the Fire Safety Order in all buildings which are in scope of the Fire Safety Order, regardless of height (see below).

What does "best endeavours" mean?

It will be for responsible persons to determine the best approach to engage with residents in order to get access to undertake the annual checks of flat entrance doors. This could include the responsible person agreeing with residents a date, so access can be granted.

Problems with access

Residents should be encouraged to allow responsible persons access to check their flat entrance doors. Use can be made of the information to residents required by these regulations, or other resident engagement strategies.

If access cannot be achieved, the responsible person should gather evidence of the steps they have taken to discharge this duty. This could include correspondence between the responsible person and resident seeking permission to gain access.

Minimum requirements for inspections of fire doors

The minimum requirement is for the responsible person to undertake an inspection of the doors to identify any obvious damage or issues. It should not be necessary to engage a specialist for these checks as the responsible person should be able to carry out these checks themselves. There are several useful guides available online which can support a responsible person in undertaking checks.

A responsible person should consider:

- if there has been any alterations or damage to a door's glazing apertures or air transfer grille
- if there are any gaps around the door frame and that seals and hinges are fitted correctly
- that the door closer shuts the door
- that the door closes correctly around the whole frame
- that there is no visible damage (either deliberate or from wear and tear) to the door or door closer

If any issues are identified from these checks, it might be appropriate to undertake more detailed checks of doors (or the self-closing device) if any damage is identified from the initial inspection. This could include engaging a specialist.

Checks of fire doors in buildings below 11 metres

The regulations do not replace the existing duty for a responsible person to put in place general fire precautions in any premises covered by the Fire Safety Order, regardless of the building's height.

The Fire Safety Act 2021 has clarified that in any residential building which contains two or more sets of domestic premises are within the scope of the Fire Safety Order.

Responsible persons for residential buildings below 11 metres in height have a duty to put in place general fire precautions in these buildings, this duty includes making sure that all fire doors – including flat entrance doors – are capable of providing adequate protection.

Responsible persons will also be required to provide residents in all residential buildings with two or more sets of domestic premises with information on fire doors.

Information responsible persons should give to residents

The information given to residents should cover the importance of keeping doors closed, that doors and self-closing devices are not tampered with and that any faults or damage to doors should be raised immediately.

Residents will receive this information when they move into a multi-occupied residential building and then on an annual basis.

As you can see this is now the time to get ahead of the game and become compliant for your own peace of mind and for that of your tenants.

Below is now the requirement you have to control smoke from stairs and lobbies plus some layman's terms in the law covering distances etc.

When installing smoke ventilation systems for residential flats and apartments there is no one size fits all approach and which option is most suitable will depend on characteristics of the property.

The two main types of smoke ventilation employed within a building are natural and mechanical. Natural Smoke Ventilation systems use the passive forces of wind – and properties of hot air rising – to draw in fresh air and provide a safe escape route for a building's occupants. In contrast Mechanical Smoke Ventilation Systems (MSVS) use powered fans connected to extract shafts to remove smoke in the event of a fire.

Approved Document B: Fire Safety of the Building Regulations provides guidance on choosing the most appropriate system based on several key factors. This includes the height of the building, internal layout of the property and the distance of each dwelling from the staircase for evacuation.

Height of the building

The first factor that needs to be considered when specifying a system is the height of the building. The guidance provided by Approved Document B (ADB) differentiates between properties with floors over 11 metres from the access level and those below this height.

Travel distance

This is the distance from the furthest flat door to the stairs that would provide the means of escape in the event of a fire. ADB sets out key travel distances that impact the selection of products. The deciding distance is 4.5m for buildings under 11m in height and 7.5 metres for those over 11m. If travel distances are more than this, mechanical, rather than natural smoke ventilation must be employed to ensure occupants can exit safely in the event of a fire.

Internal layout

The internal layout of the building and the flats themselves will decide the type of smoke protection required. If the building has more than two flats per storey or has storey with a floor height above 11m then the staircase must be lobbied – sealed off from the rest of the building by fire doors to protect the escape route. Similarly, a lobbied staircase is required if each floor has fewer flat’s but they do not have self-contained hallways internally that would stop the spread of smoke.

These factors all affect which approach needs to be taken and which system is most suitable. These can be divided up into three categories:

Natural stairway smoke ventilation

For lower rise buildings, below 11m, with short travel distances the key consideration is protecting the stairway from smoke. A stairwell smoke ventilation system, whether lobbied or un-lobbied will consist of a vent control unit linked to either a 1m² louvered stair smoke vent or stair window chain actuator. The system will also include orange smoke venting call points and a back-up battery to ensure it will continue to function in the event of a power failure. The call points are coloured orange to allow easy differentiation from the red fire alarm call points.

Natural corridor smoke ventilation

Where there is a short corridor to the stairs (less than 7.5m) this must also be protected and here a natural smoke ventilation system is suitable. The same is true for buildings with storeys over 11m where the distance is up to 7.5m. If the common corridor that leads to the staircase has a window at least 1.5m² this can be used as an automatic opening vent (AOV). If this isn't available, then a smoke shaft will have to be installed to provide an outlet for the smoke in the event of a fire. Like the stairwell smoke ventilation options, the AOV and natural smoke shaft systems will consist of the window actuator or shaft vent linked to a control system with its own power supply and call points.

Mechanical smoke ventilation

Finally, for buildings with longer travel distances, or those that cannot accommodate natural ventilation options, a MSVS must be utilised. The greater efficiency

and ventilation capacity of these systems ensures that the longer exit routes are kept clear of smoke to allow safe evacuation. A properly designed and maintained MSVS will provide a higher life safety standard for residential buildings compared with natural venting alternatives.

A typical MSVS consists of a vertical mechanical extract shaft that serves a building's common corridor and/or lobby. If smoke is detected within one of these areas, the fire damper to the smoke shaft on the affected floor will open, and the fan at the top of the shaft will activate to extract the smoke.

So this now leaves you with a plan of action to consider that does not break the bank and provides the best solution to become compliant and ensure the very best of safety for your tenants.

All Things Smoke & Fire – will attend your properties initially to inspect and compile a list of works if necessary to align your fire doors with the expectations of the new law.

Whilst on site the surveyor will review the property in its entirety and create for you a report and supply remediation solutions to make your building compliant with the following

- ***Fire Door Compliance***
- ***Fire Stopping Compliance***
- ***Fire and Smoke Compartmentation***

- ***Smoke Ventilation Solutions***
- ***Tenants Documentation***
- ***Inspection And Maintenance Schedules***

We know this sounds a lot and it can be difficult to consider how to introduce these elements into a building that is likely to be a max occupancy, this is where our surveyors are different to any others they are not looking to sell a solution rather supply you a solution and if you choose to self-deliver that solution All Things will be happy to provide a visit to satisfy the initial report and work with you to develop the inspection plan moving forward costs for the survey will be dependent upon the no of dwellings and the m2 of communal space – please call or fill out a contact form at https//www.atsaf.co.uk

Below Are A Few Examples Of How Venting Can Be Introduced Thru Loft To Make Communal Lobbies And Stairs Compliant