



# Your guide to **Building Safety**

**This guide is specific to higher-risk buildings**







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Residents should note that the information contained within this handbook is supported by the Gravesham Borough Council's policies.



# Building Safety Introduction

Building safety in higher-risk buildings is crucial for protecting residents and building owners from potential hazards such as fires, structural failures and other emergencies. For residents it provides peace of mind and security in their homes.

The information in this handbook provides information on Gravesham Borough Council's responsibilities for building safety arrangements, designed to safeguard all residents, and residents' responsibilities on how they can help to keep their families and other occupants of the building safe.



## How to raise a Building Safety concern

The Building Safety Regulator (BSR) regulates the risk of fire spread and structural failure in tall residential buildings. Gravesham Borough Council is responsible for your high-rise building safety and is referred to as the 'Principal Accountable Person' (PAP) and is supported by the Building Safety Manager (BSM).

We have a clear process in place for you to raise building safety concerns using the 'My Building Safety' app which is accessible to all residents and visitors. They can be contacted about building safety concerns, the building safety resident engagement strategy, or your building's safety management.

Examples of building safety concerns include any damage or interference to fire safety equipment such as:

- fire doors and closers
- fire safety signage
- fire sprinklers
- smoke and fire alarms, or
- anything that could increase the risk of fire spread or structural failure.



**If you wish to report a general housing repair,  
please contact 01474 337777.**

**If you wish to report a gas heating repair,  
please call 01795 509651.**

### **When we receive your building safety concern, we will:**

Confirm receipt and either accept as a relevant concern, or reject giving a reason.

### **If accepted, we will investigate your concern and:**

Provide an expected time for our response, provide updates where required, and provide a response explaining our actions and timeline to resolve the situation.

### **You can challenge the response or decision where:**

You are not satisfied with our response or decision, or you still have unresolved issues. You must detail the grounds for your challenge and provide evidence.

### **Raising a complaint:**

If you are still not satisfied with the final decision after a challenge, you still have unresolved issues, or you didn't receive a response, you can make a complaint to the Principle Accountable Person (PAP) by visiting the link below or contact 01474 337000.

<https://www.gravesham.gov.uk/contact-us/make-official-complaint>

### **You can also raise a complaint directly to the Building Safety Regulator (BSR):**

Where you are not satisfied with our response or decision, or you still have unresolved issues. You must detail the grounds for your challenge and provide evidence.

### **Contacting the BSR:**

Online: [www.gov.uk/guidance/contact-the-building-safety-regulator](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/contact-the-building-safety-regulator)

Telephone: 0300 790 6787

# Fire safety

## What is Gravesham Borough Council doing to keep my family safe from the risk of fire in my home?

- Smoke/heat alarms are installed in every room except the bathroom to provide an early warning and detection of a fire, are tested annually and replaced before expiry.  
Please contact us if you have missing detectors, so they can be installed asap.
- Heat detectors and smoke alarms in communal areas are tested weekly and serviced regularly.
- Gas boilers, pipework and other gas appliances are safety checked annually and before you move in.
- Fire sprinkler systems installed in flats within high-rise blocks are inspected and serviced annually.
- The electrical installation in your home is inspected every five years and where required upgraded in line with current standards.
- Emergency lighting installed in communal areas to provide additional lighting in the event of an evacuation is tested and serviced on a regular basis.
- Flat entrance fire doors are maintained to ensure they function correctly in the event of a fire and protect the common areas, allowing people time to escape.
- All communal fire doors are inspected quarterly to make sure they would function correctly in the event of a fire.
- Fire Risk Assessments are carried out within communal areas of all blocks of flats and independent living. Their aim is to remove/reduce the risk of fire hazards and to determine what safety measures are needed to ensure the continued safety of everyone in the building.



# Safety advice

## What fire safety measures can I take to keep my family safe?

### Smoke alarms

Your property should have a working smoke alarm. If there is a fire, a smoke alarm will alert you, giving you and everyone in your home time to escape to safety.

- You should test your smoke alarm at least once a week as recommended by Kent Fire & Rescue Service to ensure the alarm is audible (loud enough to awaken a sleeping person).
- Should the smoke alarm bleep intermittently, the battery or smoke alarm requires replacing. Never remove or tamper with your smoke alarm. Report immediately to the Housing Repairs Team.

### Fire Sprinklers

Your flat is fitted with a fire sprinkler system and in the event of a fire the temperature is raised to a level that activates the fire sprinkler head, releasing sufficient water spray to extinguish a small fire.

- Never tamper, obstruct, paint or wallpaper over sprinkler heads.
- Never attempt to turn the sprinkler system off and always report any damage or leaks as soon as possible.

### Smoke ventilation

Your building may have Passive or Automatic Opening Vents (POVs/AOVs), which are windows or openings that are designed to keep escape routes clear of smoke.



# Safety advice

## Flat Entrance Doors

Your flat should have a self-closing fire door complete with fire rated hinges, sleeved letter box including internal and external flaps, smoke and fire seals.

- Never remove or tamper with the door closer. The closer must be capable of closing the door securely into its frame from any open position.
- Always report missing items or any damage to the front door and frame immediately to the Housing Repairs Team.

## Smoking & Candles

- Never leave lit cigarettes, candles, incense burners unattended or place near furniture or curtains. Always ensure they are properly extinguished after use.
- Never smoke in bed and keep matches and lighters well out of the reach of children.

## Kitchen Safety

- Consider using dry or air fryers over deep fat fryers, as they are deemed much safer to use.
- Never fill a deep fat fryer or pan with more than 1/3 of oil, or put food inside if the oil begins to give off smoke.
- Never leave cooking unattended on the hob or grill, keep saucepan handles and matches out of the reach of children.
- Never allow fat or oil to build up in ovens, hobs or grills and always ensure they are turned off after use.



- Never put water on an oil fire as it could create a fireball. Turn off the burner immediately and put a heavy metal lid on the pan, cutting off the oxygen to the fire. Safer still, consider having a fire blanket in your kitchen.
- Never put anything metal in a microwave and ensure toasters are kept clean and not placed near anything that can catch fire.
- Use spark devices to light gas cookers – they are much safer than matches or lighters.

## Electrical Appliances

If faulty or used incorrectly, electrical appliances can start fires. Look out for warning signs like fuses that blow for no obvious reason, flickering lights, hot or scorched plugs and worn/damaged cables.

- Make sure all appliances are used in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions and turned off after use, especially portable heaters and electric blankets.
- Never overload sockets or extension leads. Remember – 'one socket, one appliance' is safest.
- Always use chargers and cables supplied by the manufacturer and avoid using cheap alternatives as these can overheat.
- Never place portable heaters near furniture or curtains and never place anything on top of them, such as to dry clothes.



**Did you know that the Housing Service has set up a dedicated Whatsapp Channel for 'Gravesham Council Tenants'?**

**Keep up to date with important announcements, repair updates, community news and helpful advice.  
This channel is for information sharing only.**



# Safety advice

## Balconies

A fire on the outside of the building has an unlimited supply of oxygen and can be spread upwards by air currents created by the heat, sideways by wind or downwards by burning material falling onto balconies below. It is therefore vital that there is nothing stored on your balcony that could burn and aid the spread of fire.

The following items present a hazard and are not permitted on balconies:

- Clotheslines and clothes
- Gas canisters, barbecues and patio heaters
- Fuel, petrol or sources of ignition of any kind (or any equipment powered by fuel e.g. generators or gardening equipment)
- Trailing cables, sockets or electrical white goods
- Paints, oils or paint thinners
- Excessive furniture or items cluttering the balcony
- Plastic or upholstered furniture
- Loose plant pots / plant pots placed insecurely on ledges
- Curtaining or enclosing of the balcony on any side i.e. bamboo screens
- Gating off any communal area or balcony
- Gazebos, tents, rabbit hutches and sheds
- Discarding cigarettes – embers can ignite combustible materials on neighbours' balconies

The above list is not exhaustive. Other items may be considered as unsuitable or unsafe at the discretion of Gravesham Borough Council.

**You are not allowed any type of combustible balcony screenings due to fire regulations.**



## E-scooters and e-bikes

The Council strongly advise against having e-scooters or e-bikes within higher-risk buildings. NEVER store or charge your e-scooter or e-bike in a communal area. If there's a fire it can affect people's ability to evacuate the building.

The number of fires involving e-scooters and e-bikes has risen year-on-year since 2019. The lithium-ion batteries that power these vehicles can be disastrous in the event of a fire. They explode, expelling poisonous gases and a tremendous amount of heat.

- Follow the manufacturer's instructions when charging and always unplug your charger when it's finished charging.
- Charge batteries whilst you are awake and alert so if a fire should occur you can respond quickly. Don't leave batteries to charge while you are asleep or away from the home.
- Always use the manufacturer approved charger and replacement battery for the product. Buy an official replacement charger or battery for your product from a reputable seller.
- Batteries can be damaged by dropping them or crashing e-bikes or e-scooters. Where the battery is damaged, it can overheat and catch fire without warning. Check your battery regularly for any signs of damage and if you suspect it is damaged it should be replaced and should not be used or charged.
- If you need to dispose of a damaged or end of life battery, don't dispose of it in your household waste or normal recycling. These batteries, when punctured or crushed, can cause fires in bin lorries, recycling and waste centres. Your e- bike or e- scooter manufacturer may offer a recycling service. Alternatively, check with your local authority for suitable battery recycling arrangements in your area.



# Safety advice

## Personal Escape Plan

Think ahead; make an escape plan so that everyone in your home knows what to do in the event of a fire.

- Take everyone into account when making your plan – it is important to think about any children, the elderly or people with particular needs who may require extra help to get out.
- Make sure you know where keys to any doors or windows are. (Never use a window to escape unless advised and assisted by the Emergency Services)
- Keep all routes clear of anything that may hinder your escape, like furniture, clothing, prams, bicycles and ensure there are no loose floor coverings that could present a trip hazard.



## Communal areas

Communal passageways and stairways form part of the escape routes for everyone in your block. What you do in the communal areas will affect other residents.

- Ensure they are always clear of items such as rubbish bags, prams, bicycles, mobility scooters or furniture. These may block your exit and emit toxic smoke/gases during a fire.
- Always report items blocking exits and your route of escape to the Housing Repairs Team.

## Statutory checks

In higher-risk buildings, the Council must check all communal fire safety equipment every month and record those checks. Information relating to these checks can be provided to residents when requested.

## Safety Inspection Day

GBC will also annually inspect the following within your flat:

- Fire alarms
- Fire sprinkler cover plates
- Front fire door (including its closing device)
- Windows
- Balcony (if you have one)

This is to make sure that all equipment is functioning correctly and that your family is kept as safe as possible. We will arrange for these inspections to be carried out all on the same day, so as to minimise inconvenience to yourself.

Please note that the schedule is being revised and so it may well be less than a year since your last inspection.



**Kent Fire and Rescue Service also offer a wide range of safety advice including free Safe and Well home visits. Find out more at [www.kent.fire-uk.org/homesafety](http://www.kent.fire-uk.org/homesafety)**



# Safety advice

## What to do if a fire breaks out in your house or flat.

- Always ensure you have an escape plan for your home and know the evacuation procedure for your block of flats.
- The evacuation procedure will be displayed on the Fire Action Notice, located in the communal area or near the main entrance.
- Alert everyone else in your house or flat and leave the building, closing doors behind you. Use the stairs to exit – never be tempted to use the lift.
- Never open doors looking for the source of the fire, stop to gather personal belongings or go back into the building until you have been told by the emergency services that it's safe to do so.
- If you have to move through smoke, keep as low as possible where the air is cleaner to help with breathing.
- Find a phone and call 999 when you are safely out of the building.

## What to do if a fire breaks out elsewhere in the building.

The best way to keep safe is to follow the evacuation plan for your building. If your flat becomes affected by smoke or you think you may be in danger, leave at once, closing windows and doors behind you.

Always provide access to maintenance and service contractors responsible for fire safety and report all faults and repairs immediately to:

[housing.repairs.team@gravesham.gov.uk](mailto:housing.repairs.team@gravesham.gov.uk) or call 01474 337777.



# Gas Servicing & Annual Safety Check

It is a legal requirement that we carry out an annual gas safety inspection in your home.

We employ a Gas Safe registered sub-contractor to check and service gas appliances. Unsafe gas appliances can create a risk of carbon monoxide poisoning and it is critical we service your gas heating appliances once every year to ensure this risk does not occur.

Our sub-contractor will contact you to arrange a convenient appointment. You **MUST** comply with this annual safety check so please co-operate to enable the check to take place.

Even if you are not on a gas supply, we will still need access to ensure circumstances have not changed since the last inspection.

If the sub-contractor is unable to gain access to your home, we will be informed and will write to you. This may lead to legal action against you to require you to provide access.

If we have to force entry to your property to service the gas appliances, you will be charged the costs along with an administration fee.



# Gas safety

Keeping you and your family safe in your home.

## How do I know if the gas engineer is Gas Safe registered?

All Sureserve (formerly Swale Heating) engineers carry a Gas Safe register ID card with a unique licence number and details what they are qualified to work on. We instruct third party auditors, Phoenix Compliance Management (PCM), who complete regular quality audits to ensure engineer qualifications are up to date and standards of work and documentation are maintained. They may contact you after a safety check or a new boiler installation, to carry out an on-site inspection.

## How can I reduce the risk of Carbon Monoxide poisoning?

Carbon monoxide (CO) is produced during the combustion of natural gas, oil and solid fuels such as coal or wood. It can increase to dangerous levels when a gas appliance has been incorrectly fitted, badly repaired or poorly maintained.

There are steps that you can take to reduce the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning in your home:

- Ensure a Gas Safe registered engineer installs your own gas cookers/hobs and they are safety checked annually.
- Sureserve will inspect your CO alarm during the safety check and replace with a new unit should it be defective or due to expire. Never tamper or remove the alarm from its location.
- Gas cookers and hobs should produce a blue flame which signifies it is burning safely. A yellow or orange flame could signify a fault and the appliance should be turned off and checked by a Gas Safe registered engineer.



## What should I do if I can smell gas?

If you think you can smell gas, it's important that you follow these steps:

- Turn off the gas at the meter using the emergency control valve (ECV).
- Put out all naked flames, including cigarettes.
- Open windows and doors to air the property.
- Do not use any electrical appliances by turning them on or off. This includes doorbells, phones and light switches.
- Call the National Gas Emergency number on Freephone 0800 111 999.

They will talk you through their safety procedure and arrange for their SGN engineer to visit within an hour. If your home has a door intercom system please open the door manually when the engineer arrives.

The SGN engineer will ensure that the gas supply is safe but they will not carry out any repairs. After their visit it is important that you report the problem to our registered heating contractor, Sureserve 01795 509651.

An engineer will then be booked in to carry out the necessary repairs. Please note, Sureserve can only send out an engineer after SGN has attended to ensure that the gas supply is safe and there is no gas leak.



**Always provide access to maintenance and service contractors responsible for Gas safety and report all faults and repairs immediately to:**

**housing.repairs.team@gravesham.gov.uk  
01474 337777.**



# Important information

## **What is Gravesham Borough Council doing to help keep my family safe?**

As your landlord, we have a legal duty of care to repair and maintain the gas pipework, flues and appliances within your home, in a safe condition. We will carry out an annual Gas Safety Check and Service in your home, performed by a qualified gas engineer.

## **What are the risks of unsafe gas appliances?**

Three main risks can arise from having an unsafe gas appliance in your home:

- Gas leaks – During a gas safety check, the engineer will inspect the gas pipework, check appliances are working safely and perform a pressure test to confirm there are no leaks.
- Fires and explosions – Gas is highly combustible. Should gas leak from an appliance or pipework there is a risk of it igniting causing a fire or explosion.
- Carbon monoxide poisoning – Carbon monoxide (CO) is a highly poisonous gas that can be especially deadly because you can't see, taste or smell it. CO detectors fitted in your home will sound an alarm when they sense dangerous levels of the gas in the atmosphere.

## **I don't use gas or have a gas supply, why do I still need a Safety Check?**

We still require access to ensure you are still not connected to the gas supply, check any existing pipework and record these details. At the same time the engineer will inspect and test your smoke alarms and if you also live in a higher-risk building, carry out a visual inspection of the fire sprinklers in your home.



# Gas safety check & service

## How is the Gas Safety Check appointment made?

Our registered contractor, Sureserve, complete gas safety checks on our behalf. When it is due, they will write to you with an appointment date. If the appointment is inconvenient, you can phone them directly or go online to change it.

[www.scs.callcentre@sureserve.co.uk/support-for-residents/](mailto:www.scs.callcentre@sureserve.co.uk/support-for-residents/)

If you are not home when they call, a card will be left showing another appointment for the following week and the option to re-arrange if inconvenient.

## What happens if I don't allow the gas engineer access?

Failure to allow access is a breach of your tenancy and if necessary, legal action will be taken to gain access to the property.

You will be recharged for the costs of obtaining a warrant and if access to the property is still denied further costs will be charged for forced entry.

If you have an external gas meter and we have made repeated unsuccessful attempts to gain access, for your safety, we will isolate the gas supply so that it cannot be used until the safety check has been completed.



**Your safety is our priority**



## How can I prepare for a Gas Safety Check?

The check takes approximately an hour and in preparation for your gas safety check, please:

- Have enough credit if you have a pre-payment gas and/ or electric meter to allow the safety check to be completed.
- Ensure the engineer can easily access the boiler, radiators and airing cupboard.
- Turn off the gas boiler and all other gas appliances at least 2 hours before the engineer is due to call, to ensure the system has cooled down sufficiently to be worked on.

During the visit an adult should be present and children and pets should not enter the areas where the safety checks are being completed.

## What will be checked during the Gas Safety Check?

A gas appliance safety check ensures an appliance is:

- Properly set and adjusted so the gas burns correctly.
- Suitable for the room it's located in.
- Physically stable, securely fitted and properly connected to the gas pipework.
- Provided with adequate and permanent air supply, suitable for the appliance installed.

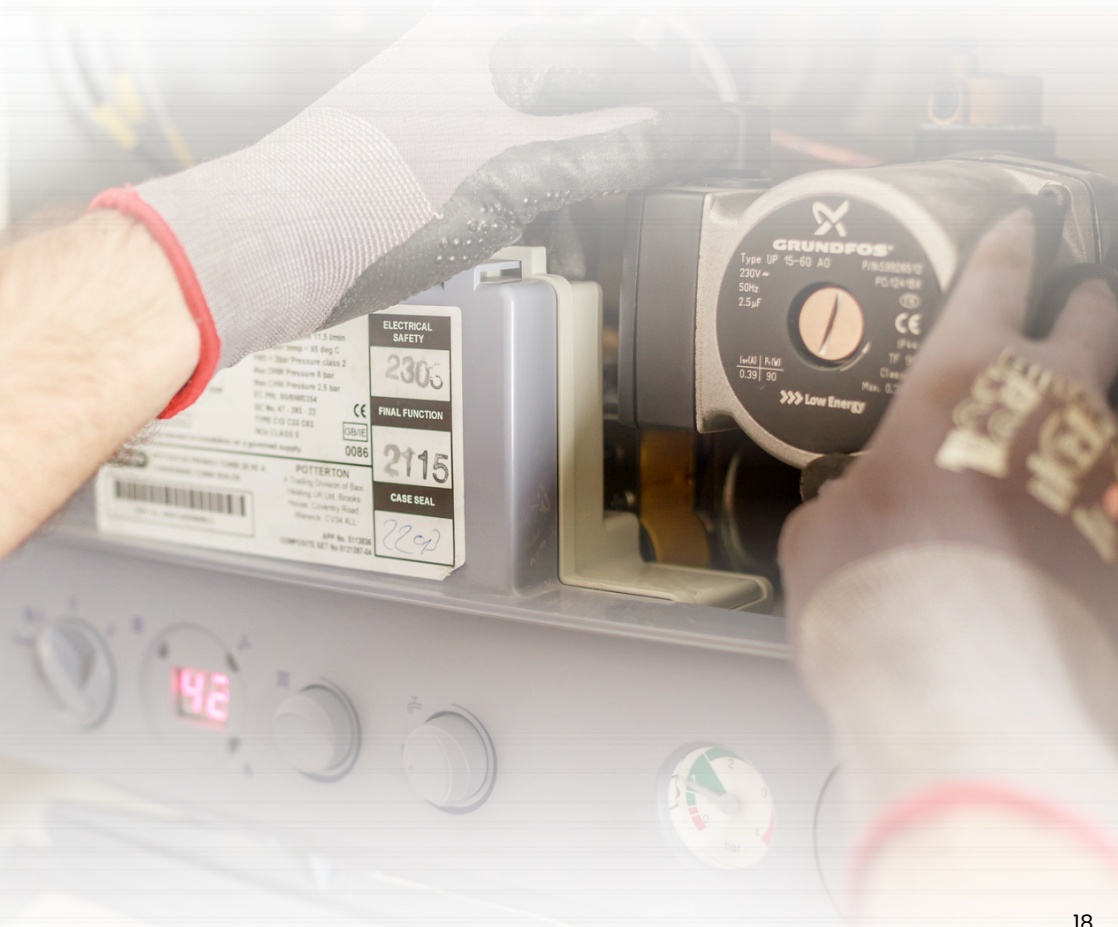
The engineer will also ensure:

- All safety devices are functioning properly.
- Any flues, chimneys and air vents are operating correctly.
- The installation is in good condition by visually inspecting the pipework as far as reasonably practicable.
- The gas pipework is tested to ensure there are no leaks.

In addition, the engineer will service the gas boiler as detailed in the manufacturer's instructions. These may include:

- Analysis of the combustion exhaust gases to ensure the appliance is burning gas safely.
- A check of the appliance's condition including signs of heat or distress, effectiveness of seals and gaskets, and cleanliness of heat exchangers.
- Ensuring a working CO detector is fitted in each room that has a gas appliance.

If new parts or further repairs are required, Sureserve will arrange another appointment to carry out the works.



# Electrical safety



## Reducing the risks

### What safety measures can I take when carrying out DIY?

- Seek permission from Gravesham Borough Council BEFORE carrying out any electrical work.
- Always use a qualified electrician to carry out any electrical works
- When hanging pictures or shelves, check there are no cables where you are fixing. An electric cable detector is a useful device at locating cable runs within walls.
- Outside sockets should be weatherproof and have a minimum rating of IP56, however a higher rating of IP66 or 68 is recommended.
- Fully uncoil power leads and extension reels to equipment to prevent overheating.

### What safety measures can I take when charging my devices?

- Always use the charger provided by the manufacturer or an approved replacement.
- Don't leave items continuously on charge (after the charge cycle is complete), especially overnight.
- Do not cover devices in use, or batteries that are on charge to avoid overheating.

## What safety measures can I take when using electrical appliances?

- Only use appliances with a recognised kite mark and as advised in the manufacturer's instructions.
- Only use the correct rating and size of fuse as stated for the appliance. Using the wrong fuse can cause a cable to overheat and the appliance may no longer be protected against an electrical fault.
- If an appliance appears faulty, do not use it. If in doubt get the appliance checked by a qualified electrician.
- Keep appliances clean and in good working order. Never clean an appliance while it is still plugged in.
- Only use electric blankets that have an automatic shut off feature that is activated once the blanket reaches a certain temperature and prevents it from overheating.
- Hair straighteners/dryers get extremely hot. Always switch them off and let them cool on a heatproof surface.
- Switch off appliances at the socket when you're not using them. Not only does this save you money, but it significantly reduces the chances of a fire starting.
- Electricity and water can be a deadly combination; do not use appliances such as hairdryers in bathrooms, unless suitable and stated in the manufacturer's user instructions.
- Ensure a second-hand appliance has passed a Portable Appliance Test (PAT) carried out by a qualified electrician.
- When using portable electric heaters, never dry clothes over them, leave unattended or turned on overnight. Always place the heater upright on a flat smooth surface.

## What are the dangers of electricity in my home?

- Damaged plugs, sockets and flexible cables can cause electric shocks, burns and fires.
- Faults with appliances and electrical installations can cause fires. Electricity can potentially ignite flammable gasses in the atmosphere.
- Contact with live electrical parts can cause serious burns and be life threatening.

## What are the signs that fittings and appliances may be a safety risk?

- Discolouration, burn or scorch marks on plugs, leads and fittings.
- Fraying appliance leads or exposed internal wires.
- Loose cord grips in plugs or appliances.
- Sounds of 'arcing' (buzzing or crackling), smell of burnt plastic or if it feels hot to touch.
- Lights flickering or flashes coming from power sockets or light switches when you turn them on.
- Fuses blowing or circuit breakers (RCDs) continuously tripping is a good indicator that an appliance could be faulty.







# Safety checks & Standards

## What is Gravesham Borough Council doing to help keep my family safe?

- We carry out an electrical safety check before you move in and continue to maintain the installation in a safe condition throughout the tenancy. Installations include things like plug sockets, consumer units, light fittings and electric heating systems.
- All electrical works and upgrades will be carried out by a NICEIC approved contractor in accordance with current British Standards and certified upon completion.
- A periodic inspection of the electrical installation in your property is tested for safety every 5 years, by a NICEIC approved electrical contractor and a copy of the report made available to you on request.
- All installations will have a Residual Circuit Device (RCD) installed within the consumer unit (fuse box) to provide additional protection against electric shock.

## What happens during the safety inspection?

The 'fixed' electrical parts of the property, like the wiring, power sockets, light fittings and consumer unit will be inspected. This includes permanently connected equipment such as showers and extractors.

The inspection will find out if:

- any electrical installations are overloaded
- there are any potential risks of electric shock or fire hazards
- there is any defective electrical work,
- there is a lack of earthing or bonding – these are 2 ways of preventing electrical shocks that are built into electrical installations.

Where additional remedial works are required, the electrician will arrange and complete these works before a satisfactory electrical certificate for the installation is issued.

## What safety measures can I take to keep my family safe when using electricity?

- Carry out regular checks of the condition of your cables, switches, sockets and other accessories. Replace damaged parts immediately and before use.
- Carefully remove plugs from sockets. Pulling out a plug by its cable puts strain on it and can result in damage to components. Wires that become loose can potentially cause an electric shock.
- Keep electrical leads, plugs and appliances away from water and never use electrical equipment and switches with wet hands.
- Never wrap cables around equipment while it is still warm, allow sufficient time for it to cool.
- Never “double up” on sockets and stick to the “one socket – one appliance” rule.
- Avoid overloading adaptors and extension leads, particularly with high current appliances such as kettles, irons and heaters.
- Never use multiple extension leads to run appliances. They should be completely unwound to avoid overheating.
- Keep children and pets away from trailing cables and leads. If unavoidable use cable tidies and cover strips.
- Only use adaptors, extension leads and appliances showing the British Standard or European Standard kite marks pictured here. Avoid cheaper alternatives.



# Asbestos safety

## What is Asbestos and why was it used?

Asbestos is a natural occurring mineral which can be found in rocks all over the world. Asbestos fibres are strong and flexible with excellent fire proofing and insulating qualities, hence why they were commonly added to building materials. Most homes built between 1930s and 1990s feature some building products with ACMs (Asbestos Containing Materials).

Its use in the construction industry was finally banned in the UK in 1999. So if your home was built after this date it is very unlikely to contain asbestos.

The three types of asbestos which were used in the UK are crocidolite (blue asbestos), amosite (brown asbestos) and chrysotile (white asbestos). It is not possible to tell whether a material contains asbestos by simply looking at it.



## Is asbestos in my home safe?

DIY work can result in brief but high levels of exposure and potentially further ongoing exposure over time.

If ACMs (Asbestos Containing Materials) are in good condition and positioned where they will not be disturbed or damaged, then it is safer to leave them where they are and ensure the risks are managed.

The greatest risk arises when ACMs are sawn, drilled, sanded or scrubbed causing the release of fibres. Asbestos fibres released during these activities cannot be seen with the naked eye. DIY work can result in brief but high levels of exposure that can put your family at risk.



## Why is asbestos a health risk?

If breathed in, asbestos fibres can remain in the lungs for a substantial amount of time and cause long term health problems, such as thickening of the lung lining which causes breathing difficulties, or serious diseases such as lung cancer, mesothelioma and asbestosis.

## What is Gravesham Borough Council doing about asbestos in my home?

We are committed to ensuring the health, safety and welfare of all our residents, visitors, contractors and staff, by identifying and managing the risks of asbestos materials in our buildings.

We are doing this by:

- Collating information through surveys, testing and regular re-inspections, to determine the presence, type and condition of asbestos. These works will be carried out by licensed and UKAS accredited consultants.
- Recording all asbestos information on our Asbestos Database as part of GBC's comprehensive management plan and complying with HSE requirements.
- Assessing and managing the risk from materials containing asbestos in all of our properties.
- Providing information, when asked, about the condition and location of materials containing asbestos to anyone who could be exposed to them.
- Ensuring all our repair operatives are fully trained and equipped to carry out repairs and maintenance work safely without disturbing ACMs.
- Checking the asbestos database to identify any ACMs prior to undertaking any planned maintenance in your home.
- Removing or encapsulating ACMs identified in poor condition. These works will be carried out by licensed and UKAS accredited contractors.

Encapsulating can be a safer alternative especially if the asbestos is only slightly damaged or cannot be removed. The procedure involves treating the asbestos with a sealant that forms a protective layer between the material and indoor environment. This ensures wear-and-tear won't cause microfibers to be released into the air.

Generally if the asbestos is in good condition and is not likely to be disturbed or damaged when worked on or near, then its best left in place. This is in line with current Health and Safety Executive (HSE) guidelines.



## Safety advice

### **What about appliances and household items that may contain asbestos?**

Very old items such as cookers, ironing board pads, fire blankets and oven gloves may contain asbestos. If you are planning to dispose of any of these items and think they may contain asbestos, please contact the Housing Repairs Team for advice.

### **Should I worry if I have asbestos in my home?**

There's no need to panic – it's unlikely to be a danger to your health as long as it's undamaged, or hasn't been disturbed. If it has, contact the Housing Repairs Team, who will advise on appropriate action.

### **Vinyl Floor Tiles**

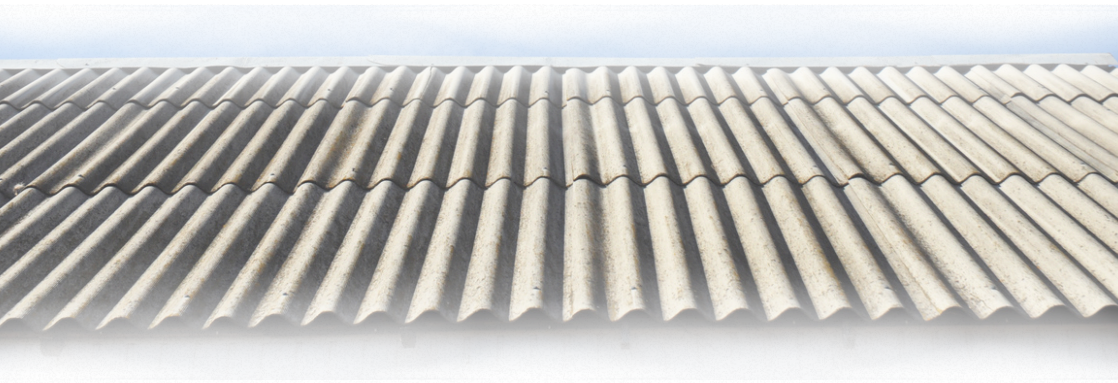
Floor tiles and the adhesive used may contain a relatively low amount of asbestos in homes constructed before 1980. They can also remain in place if undamaged or undisturbed.

## Textured Coatings (Artex or similar)

Homes constructed prior to year 2000 may contain asbestos in textured coatings. The quantity of asbestos in Artex is relatively low but you should never sand down, scrape, remove or plaster over without seeking professional advice.

## Cement Roof Sheets

Some older sheds or garages may have corrugated roof sheets made of asbestos cement. Asbestos cement is very durable and roof sheets can remain in place, if in good condition.



## How do I get more information on asbestos in my home?

You can request a copy of the asbestos survey for your home, identifying the presence of ACMs.

Leaseholders will need to arrange and pay for their own asbestos survey and removal if necessary, by an approved and licensed contractor.

If you require further information and advice please visit the Health & Safety Executive's website:  
[www.hse.gov.uk/asbestos](http://www.hse.gov.uk/asbestos)

Always provide access to asbestos surveyors and removal contractors. Report all damage or deterioration immediately to:  
[housing.repairs.team@gravesham.gov.uk](mailto:housing.repairs.team@gravesham.gov.uk)  
01474 337777.

# Water hygiene

We need to ensure you are aware of the causes and symptoms of Legionnaires' disease so you can identify any problems and report concerns to us.

## What is Legionnaires' disease?

Legionnaires' disease is a potentially fatal form of pneumonia, which can affect anyone.

It is caused by the inhalation of small droplets of water from contaminated sources containing Legionella bacteria.

## Legionnaires' temperatures



**0°C**

Bacterium  
dormant



**20°C - 45°C**

Legionella will  
multiply



**45°C - 60°C**

Legionella will  
survive but  
cannot  
multiply



**60°C+**

Legionella will  
not survive

## Who is at risk?

Anyone can get Legionnaires' disease, but it most commonly affects the elderly, or people with chest, lung or other serious health problems. Not everyone exposed to Legionella bacteria will become ill. It is not contagious and you can't get it from drinking water.

The symptoms of Legionnaires' disease are similar to those of flu:

- high temperature
- fever or chills
- headache
- tiredness
- muscle pain
- dry cough



## What to do if you think you may have Legionnaires' disease?

If you think that you or someone in your home has Legionnaires' disease, contact your doctor immediately.

You should also contact us so that we can take the appropriate action to make sure you are safe in your home.

## Where is Legionella found?

All hot and cold water systems in homes are a potential source for Legionella bacteria growth.

The main areas of risk are where the bacteria can multiply and increase to dangerous levels and then spread, e.g. in spray from showers and taps, even in dishwasher and washing machine pipes.

Bacteria will grow where water is between 20°C and 45°C and where there is sludge, rust and scale for the bacteria to feed upon and multiply.





# Reducing the risk

## **What is Gravesham Borough Council doing to reduce the risk of Legionella bacteria developing?**

- Carry out regular risk assessments to identify the level of risk and implement a suitable maintenance and monitoring regime on all shared water systems.
- Regularly collate and monitor temperature readings, carry out sampling and disinfection treatment.
- Ensure risk assessors and water management contractors are experienced and accredited having specialist knowledge on Legionella and water treatment services.
- Identify, improve and upgrade water systems in order to remove or reduce the risk of Legionella bacteria developing.
- Provide health and safety advice to all our tenants and leaseholders on how to reduce the risk with good housekeeping.

## **The following good housekeeping advice will keep your family safe:**

The biggest risk is if your home has been empty for more than one week without running water and these simple steps can reduce that risk:

- Run the taps for at least three minutes
- Hold the shower head over the drain, to reduce the risk of inhaling water droplets and run the water for a few minutes
- Flush the toilet twice with the lid down.

## Other tips to reduce risk

- Keep all shower-heads and taps clean and free from build-up of limescale, mould or algae growth.
- Regular cleaning with bleach or an anti-bacterial cleanser every three months will help sterilise and kill any bacteria.
- Report any rust or any unusual matter flowing from your water outlets to us or your local water authority.
- Heat the water in your hot water tank and use it immediately at least two to three times a week.
- Hot water should be stored at a temperature of 60°C or greater (immersion tanks etc.).
- Drain hosepipes after use and keep out of direct sunlight. Flush through for a couple of minutes before filling paddling pools etc.
- Ensure that you turn on taps each week for at least two minutes.
- Raising the temperature of warm water is one way to control Legionella growth, but could also increase the risk of burns and scalding. Please take care especially if you have children.



## Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs)

They happen annually so please do give us a little of your time if we approach you for your views.





**Gravesham**  
Borough Council

