

Lessee Advisory Note on Health & Safety

Note: - One of ARMA's key roles is to provide its members with technical support. However, from time to time, technical or other issues arise where guidance for lessees as well as their property manager is deemed appropriate. Such guidance is contained in these Lessee Advisory Notes (LANs) which ARMA members can copy and distribute to their clients and lessees as appropriate.

SUMMARY

- This advisory note summarises the main health and safety regulations that apply to blocks of flats. There are many others.
- The duty to comply with the regulations falls on the landlord or person responsible for management which could be an agent, a resident management company or a right to manage company.
- Health & safety should never be ignored or dismissed because it requires additional expenditure.
- The cost of failing to comply if there is an accident or injury may be far greater.

RISK ASSESSMENT OF COMMON AREAS

All blocks of flats must have a risk assessment carried out of the health and safety of any common areas. It is a requirement of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999. You may argue common areas are not "at work" but if any cleaner, gardener, managing agent or repair contractors enters them, then a risk assessment must be made. Remember to include all areas including gardens, grounds, plant rooms, meter cupboards and lift motor rooms.

If there are no employees of the landlord working at the block there is no requirement to record the risk assessment but it would be foolish not to do so. If there were to be an accident and you had no proof of a risk assessment being carried out, you are much more likely to be prosecuted and/or sued for negligence. The risk assessment should be reviewed at least annually.

FIRE SAFETY

From 1st October 2006 every block of flats will also require a fire safety risk assessment. Again this applies to common parts, not to the inside of any flats and is an obligation on the landlord.

Fire Officers will be able to enter any block of flats to inspect, ask to see the risk assessment and issue enforcement notices to improve fire safety should the need arise.

WORKING AT HEIGHTS

Work at heights can be at any height if a person could be injured falling from it, even if below ground level. If window cleaners or other contractors visit a block of flats, then an assessment of the risk from working at heights is required. Part of the duty to assess risk will obviously fall on the window cleaner, but the landlord or his agent once again also has a duty.

The principle is that any work at height should be avoided if it is practical to do it in another way. If it cannot be avoided, then the work must be assessed and planned to be done with the least risk. Work at height can include changing light bulbs, general cleaning, testing smoke detectors and cleaning gutters.

If a ladder is supplied by the landlord for changing light bulbs or checking smoke detectors, it should be checked regularly and a notice stuck on it with safety precautions for its use.

ELECTRICAL EQUIPMENT SAFETY

If electrical equipment is supplied by the landlord or agent to say a cleaner, then it must be regularly tested and properly maintained. A visual inspection and a more formal test should be carried out at the intervals recommended by the Institution of Engineering and Technology.

LEGIONELLA

Legionella is a bacteria common in water systems which can result in legionnaires' disease. Once again the landlord or agent of a block of flats has a duty to control the risks of legionella in any pipes, tanks and taps in common parts (including a cleaner's cupboard). Cold water tanks, taps and showers within lessees' flats are the responsibility of the lessees, unless the lease puts repairing responsibility for them on the landlord.

The starting point is a risk assessment usually carried out by an expert, and if there are risks then a written action plan should be produced to reduce the risks. An annual review of the risk assessment should be made.

COSHH

COSHH is the control of substances hazardous to health. The most usual relevant substances found in blocks of flats in common parts are cleaning materials and possibly gardening chemicals.

Once again the duty is on the landlord or agent to assess the risks from any materials stored in the common areas. Most materials carry labels that identify the hazards that they may pose, manufacturers also issue safety sheets on how to handle the materials. It is a duty to decide what instructions must be given to those who may handle the materials to reduce risks, and what protective clothing may be needed.

If a contractor at the block is to use hazardous materials, then it is a duty of the landlord or agent to obtain a COSHH risk statement from the contractor.

RIDDOR

RIDDOR is the reporting of injuries, diseases and dangerous occurrences. The regulations require the reporting of work related accidents, diseases and dangerous occurrences. Even if a landlord or agent has used a self employed contractor to work at a block of flats, it is the landlord's duty to report an accident to that contractor. The duty also applies if a member of the public is injured at the block.

There is a national incident centre to which reports should be made.

MANAGING ASBESTOS

Landlords and agents are under a duty to be aware of any asbestos containing material in the structure or common parts of blocks of flats.

The duty is specific and it is necessary to identify any asbestos which may involve a survey, to maintain an asbestos register for any block where there are asbestos containing materials, and to have a policy for the management and control of the asbestos.

There is not a duty to remove asbestos, indeed to do so in many cases is far more dangerous than to leave it. What is important is that if any contractors are working in the block near asbestos the landlord or agent must inform them of the presence of the material.

ENFORCEMENT

You may argue that the risks in a block of flats are few and things do not go wrong. However, the consequences if there is a fire, accident or injury at a block can be serious.

The body which enforces most health and safety matters is the Health and Safety Executive. (Some matters are enforced by local authorities and the fire service). The HSE can issue improvement notices to require landlords to take action to reduce risks e.g. install railings or handrails to prevent falls and prohibition notices to cease an activity if there is a risk of serious injury. Failure to action may result in prosecution.

During 2004/5 the HSE issued 8445 enforcement notices, and brought 712 prosecutions. Of the prosecutions 95% were successful in securing a conviction and the average penalty fine was £18,765.

There is a cost to blocks of flats in ensuring compliance with health and safety regulations but there is a much higher cost if things go wrong because of a failure to comply.

FURTHER INFORMATION

The regulations mentioned in this advisory note are:

- The Management of Health and Safety at Work 1999.
- The Work at Height Regulations 2005
- The Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations 2002.
- The Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1995.
- The Control of Substances Hazardous to Health 2002.
- The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.
- The Electricity at Work Regulations 1989
- The Private Water Supplies Regulations 1991

The best source of advice and leaflets is the website of the Health and Safety Executive www.hse.gov.uk.

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