

# Keeping you and your home safe

Guidance for homeowners



Housing and Constituencies

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# Your handy guide

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This booklet provides guidance for homeowners on how to keep your home safe.

We have other leaflets providing useful tips. These include one about maintaining the inside of your home, one about keeping the outside in good condition and one about saving energy. Just ask us if you'd like a copy of any of them or you can find them on our website.

If you can't manage any of the work yourself or don't have the time, don't worry - we can help you find reliable contractors, whether you need a plumber, an electrician, a builder, a roofer or any other tradesperson.

This is just one of a range of services we provide to homeowners in Birmingham through our Homeworks team. We offer impartial advice and practical assistance to help you make your home a better place to live in so if you have any questions please call us. You will also find useful

information sheets on a wide range of home maintenance tasks in any large DIY store or you might want to buy a good quality DIY book.

If you rent your home from the council your tenants' handbook and your repairs handbook have information about home maintenance.

## Safety

Most accidents happen in and around the home but there are a few simple steps you can take to reduce the risks.

You can buy also a variety of safety aids from DIY stores, hardware merchants and specialist shops. These are especially useful if you have children and include socket covers, corner protectors, hand rails, stair gates, fireguards and safety film for windows.

Here are common hazards and how to avoid them:

### Stairs

- Make sure you replace any worn carpet
- Keep the stairs free of clutter, like toys
- Fit an extra hand rail if your stairs are steep
- Keep the carpet tacked down
- Make sure your stairs are well lit
- If you have young children, fit stair gates to the top and bottom - and use them!

### Windows and glass

- Replace windows that are in a vulnerable position with safety glass - danger spots are windows at a low level or at the bottom of steps. You can use safety film as a cheaper alternative
- Fit window stays on upstairs windows to stop children climbing through them and falling

### Burns and scalds

Burns from hot surfaces and scalds from hot liquids or steam can cause traumatic injuries and leave permanent scars.

- Keep guards on fires and turn radiators down when children are about
- Keep saucepan handles from sticking out on the hob
- Don't let kettle leads trail where children could pull them
- Keep hot drinks away from children - and remember, a hot drink stays hot enough to scald a child for 15 minutes

### Falls

- Don't step over hazards - do something about them
- Don't let wires trail where they could trip people up
- Replace or tack down frayed carpets

## Fire

Every year too many people die because of a fire in their home - and smoke is the biggest killer.

- Fit smoke alarms to give you early warning. It's best to fit them in the hall and on the upstairs landing. Fix them to the ceiling rather than the wall and replace the batteries every year
- Don't take out the batteries to use them for something else - it could cost you your life
- Vacuum the alarm out every now and again to get rid of any dust that might stop it working so well
- Keep matches and lighters away from children - buy safety matches too
- Don't leave lit candles unattended
- Don't overload sockets and extension cables as this might lead to an electrical fault that could cause a fire

- Get a qualified electrician to check your wiring every five years
- Always replace a blown fuse with the right one
- Keep the key to any locked window or door that could be used as an fire escape route close to hand

## Security

Crime is a fact of life wherever you live. But you can take a few simple precautions to reduce your chances of becoming a victim.

Here are a few cheap and easy things you can do to improve the security of your home.

### DO

- Get to know your neighbours - they will keep an eye on your house when you're out and you can return the favour
- Join a neighbourhood watch scheme - you can find out details from your local police

- Keep your home looking as if someone is in it - leave a light that uses a low energy bulb on
- Fit good quality locks to your doors and windows - and use them!
- Fit a mortice lock to your back door - most burglars force their way in around the side or the back of people's homes
- Be careful about who you open the door to - they may not be who they say they are. If in doubt, don't let them in and keep the door closed while you check their identification. Genuine callers will not mind waiting outside while you do this
- Lock up garden tools because burglars sometimes use them to force open doors and windows

Also, if you share an entrance gate to a side alley with your neighbours, why not club together to buy a padlock? Make sure everyone has a key and keeps it locked.

## **DON'T**

- Make it obvious when you bring expensive purchases into your home and don't put the boxes out on the street with your rubbish
- Provide cover for burglars - keep plants clipped low around windows and doors
- Leave windows open, even upstairs, when you go out - burglars can climb drain pipes and break in from flat roof

## **Locks for timber doors**

Locks are obviously a good way of deterring criminals - but remember they are only as strong as the door or the door frame. An expensive lock is useless if a burglar can easily force the door open.

There are two types of door locks:

- Mortice locks - these fit into a slot cut into the side of a door. They are the most secure type of lock. Insurance companies recommend a five-lever mortice deadlock for all outside doors

- Rim locks - these fit onto the inside face of a door. They are less secure than mortice locks

Window locks are also a good idea. It's best to fit ones that work automatically when you shut the window because they are less fiddly and you're more likely to use them.

When you buy a window lock, look out for the symbol - British Standard kite mark a guarantee of quality. Security locks meeting this standard are fitted on all new UPVC doors and windows.

## **Security lights**

You can use security lights to deter unwelcome visitors.

Always follow the instructions supplied with the light and be considerate to your neighbours so that the light isn't shining into their property. Also make sure that the light isn't positioned where it will be set off by cats or by people walking on the pavement.

## **Fencing**

For tips on how fencing can make your home more secure, please read our booklet called 'Maintaining the outside of your home'.

## **Gas**

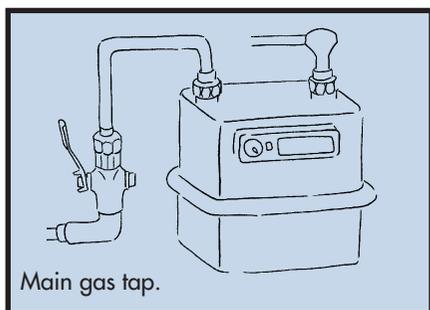
If you do just one thing after reading this booklet, get any gas appliances you have checked once a year. It could save your life.

Gas is very safe as long as you make sure that any appliances are fitted and maintained by a registered installer/operative. Call the Health and Safety Executive free on 0800 300 363 to get details about who to ring to find a registered operative in your area.

## What to do if you smell gas

Before any problem happens, make sure you know where the main gas tap is in your home and that you can get to it easily at all times.

The tap will be on the gas pipe, probably near the gas meter. In most cases the gas will be off when the lever is at a right angle to the pipe. Here is what a typical gas tap looks like when it is on.



If you can smell gas strongly or the gas flames are burning yellow, you need to act quickly.

### DO

- Open windows
- Turn off the main gas tap if you can get to it

- Call the emergency gas line - go to a neighbour's house or a public phone or use your mobile phone but make sure you are out in the open air first
- Remember to turn the gas supply back on and relight the pilot light on the boiler and your cooker after the emergency is over

### DON'T

- Switch any lights on and off anywhere in your home
- Enter the room where the smell of gas is very strong

**EMERGENCY GAS LINE -  
available 24 hours a day  
0800 111 999**

## Everyday tips

### DO

- Clear up any spills on your cooker hob as soon as they happen
- Clear the gas jets if they become blocked - a cocktail stick is ideal to clear the holes
- If you can remove the burner (the metal disk where the flames come out), use a washing up brush to remove any food spills and the yellow grease given off by the burning gas

### DON'T

- Cook any food directly in the flames of your gas burner - the latest health advice is that the food absorbs high levels of toxins

## The silent killer

Carbon monoxide is a poisonous substance which is produced when gas is burned.

If a gas appliance isn't working properly, it may produce more carbon monoxide - and if it can't escape, it can build up to dangerous levels.

Carbon monoxide is a gas. You can't smell it or see it so it's very difficult to detect without special equipment.

Here are a few tips that could save your life:

- Follow the steps set out in the section called 'What to do in an emergency' and call the emergency gas line if your gas fire does any of the following:
- Burns yellow flames
- Has stains on the front
- Gives you a headache every time you use it

- Always get any portable gas appliances serviced by a registered company once a year
- Never use portable gas appliances without opening a window
- Never use a cooker to heat a room as fumes can build up
- Never block ventilation vents or flues - they are essential to let waste gases escape. Usually the flues are at the back of your gas fire or behind your central heating boiler
- Always get your gas flue inspected by a registered company once a year. Late summer is a good time because birds' nest and any other debris can be cleared before the weather turns cold. Service engineers are often very busy at the start of the winter, so book early
- Buy one or more carbon monoxide detectors - they are cheap and easily available from DIY stores.

## Electricity

You should only repair or maintain electrical items and wiring if you are completely confident that you know what you're doing.

Please don't try to do the work if you're not sure. If in doubt, call in an electrician from a company approved by NICEIC - this is the organisation which makes sure that electrical contractors work safely.

Here is the logo you should look out for when choosing a company.



## Important safety tips

- Do not expose any wires on a circuit which may be live without first turning the power off at the main isolating switch
- Only let a NICEIC-approved electrician do any remedial work to your home or totally rewire it

Everyone should be able to do some simple bits of electrical work like putting on a plug or replacing a fuse. Make sure you know what to do - you can pick up information in any DIY store or buy yourself a DIY book with illustrations.

## About electricity

Electricity enters your home through a thick wire which goes straight to your electricity meter. Your electricity supplier is responsible for the meter and the wiring - never interfere with either of these because they are dangerous.

You will have something called a consumer unit in your home. This is what used to be called a fuse box.



The consumer unit channels the electricity into smaller wires which supply your sockets, lights and cooker. This is where you can turn the electricity off if anything goes wrong. The unit also contains an automatic safety device called a fuse which prevents wires in your home getting so hot that they will start a fire. In many homes fuses have been replaced by circuit breakers in a consumer unit which turns the electricity off if anything goes wrong. As they are so quick to react, the danger of getting an electric shock is dramatically reduced.

If a fuse blows, there will always be a reason. If it's not obvious, call in a qualified electrician to find out why before replacing the fuse.

Always turn off the socket and remove the plug before taking any appliance apart.

## Common problems

Flickering lights - if the bulb on your strip light flickers or takes a long time to come on, try replacing the starter unit - this is the plastic cylinder in the side of the light fitting

A fuse keeps blowing - if the same fuse blows more than once, you may have a problem with your appliance - it's best to get it checked out by an electrician

A plug becomes hot - if you notice that a plug has become unusually warm, there may be a loose wire inside. Be extra careful how you remove the plug from the socket and make sure you switch it off first

A plug becomes corroded - plugs and sockets in damp areas such as at the back of a washing machine may become corroded. If the socket is affected, call in a qualified electrician

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A wrong bulb is used - don't put a powerful bulb in a standard light or lamp socket because the extra heat could cause a fire. The recommended maximum wattage is usually shown on the appliance or light fitting

An extension reel is kept wound up - always unwind reels fully to let the heat from the wire escape

## Asbestos

Asbestos was widely used in the materials and fabric of buildings in the past but is now banned because of the health risks it carries. It's only when asbestos is disturbed that there is a potential hazard. If the asbestos is in good condition and not likely to be worked on or damaged, it is safest to leave it in place.

Unless you have a good working knowledge of asbestos, it won't be easy to recognise it in your home, but common places where it might be found are:

- Roof slates and corrugated roofing sheets
- Gutters and downpipes
- Insulation in party walls
- Soffits and fascias
- Cold water tank insulation
- Bath panels
- Ceiling and floor tiles
- Flue pipes
- Lagging around boilers and heating pipes

If you want asbestos waste removed from your home, you must use a specialist contractor to remove and dispose of it. We can give you a list of companies which are approved to do this. Home owners on limited incomes may qualify for financial help to sort out the problem. Please call us on 0121 303 1116 for more information or advice.

## How to contact us

We provide a wide range of services and help for homeowners. For more details:

- ring our Homeworks helpline on 0121 303 1116
- email us at [homeworks@birmingham.gov.uk](mailto:homeworks@birmingham.gov.uk)
- visit our website at [www.birmingham.gov.uk/housing](http://www.birmingham.gov.uk/housing) for more information or to fill in an enquiry form
- write to us at Homeworks, Birmingham City Council, Housing and Constituencies Directorate, PO BOX 11415, Birmingham B11 1ZB

**This is important.** If you do not understand this document then please ask a friend or relative, who speaks English, to contact your local neighbourhood office or housing team on your behalf. We will then arrange for an interpreter to meet with you.

هذه الرسالة مهمة، فإن لم تفهمها نرجو أن تطلب من أحد أصدقائك أو أقربائك ممن يتكلمون الإنجليزية أن يتصل بمكتبه المحلي "تيريهود أوفوس" المحلي أو فريق الإسكان نيابة عنك. بعد ذلك سنرتب للقاء بك مع وجود مترجم فوري.

ARABIC

এটা খুবই গুরুত্বপূর্ণ। আপনি এই দলিলটি বুঝতে না পারলে দয়া করে ইংরেজীতে কথা বলতে পারেন এজন্য আপনার একজন বন্ধু-বান্ধব বা আত্মীয়কে আপনার পক্ষ হয়ে আপনার স্থানীয় সেইবারহুড অফিস বা হাউজিং টিম এর সঙ্গে যোগাযোগ করতে বলুন। এরপর আমরা আপনার সঙ্গে সাফল্য করার ব্যবস্থা করব এবং এতে সহায়তার জন্য একজন ইন্টারপ্রিটার রাখা হবে।

BENGALI

此事極為重要，如果你看不懂這份文件，請找一位會講英語的親戚或朋友代你接觸當地的鄰舍辦事處或房屋服務隊。然後我們會安排傳譯員一起見你。

CHINESE

این اطلاعات بسیار مهم است. اگر محتوی این مدرک را نمی فهمید، لطفاً از یک دوست یا خویشاوندتان که به زبان انگلیسی صحبت کرده میتواند خواهش کنید که از طرف شما با تیریهود آفس یا هوزنگ تیم محل شما تماس بگیرد. بعداً برای شما مترجم فراهم می کنیم که باشما ملاقات کند.

FARSI

આ બાબત અગત્યની છે. જો તમને આ દસ્તાવેજમાં લખેલી બાબત ન સમજાય તો કૃપા કરી કોઈ અંગ્રેજી બોલતા મિત્ર અથવા અગાસંબંધીને તમારી સ્થાનિક નેબરહુડ ઓફિસ અથવા હાઉસિંગ ટીમનો તમારા વતિ સંપર્ક સાધવા વિનંતી કરો. પછી દુબાઈમાં સાથે તમને મળવાની અમે વ્યવસ્થા કરીશું.

GUJARATI

ਇਹ ਗੱਲ ਬੜੀ ਜ਼ਰੂਰੀ ਹੈ। ਜੇ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਇਸ ਪਰਚ ਦੀ ਸਮਝ ਨਹੀਂ ਲੱਗਦੀ ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਅਪਣੇ ਕਿਸੇ ਅੰਗਰੇਜ਼ੀ ਬੋਲਣ ਵਾਲੇ ਦੋਸਤ ਜਾਂ ਰਿਸ਼ਤੇਦਾਰ ਨੂੰ ਕਹੋ ਕਿ ਉਹ ਤੁਹਾਡੇ ਵਾਸਤੇ ਸਥਾਨਕ ਨੇਬਰਹੁਡ ਔਫਿਸ ਜਾਂ ਹਾਉਸਿੰਗ ਟੀਮ ਨਾਲ ਸੰਪਰਕ ਕਰੇ। ਉਸ ਤੋਂ ਬਾਅਦ ਅਸੀਂ ਕਿਸੇ ਦੋਭਾਸ਼ੀਏ ਰਾਹੀਂ ਤੁਹਾਡੇ ਨਾਲ ਗੱਲ ਕਰਨ ਦਾ ਪ੍ਰਬੰਧ ਕਰਾਂਗੇ।

PUNJABI

داویر مهم معلومات دی. کہ تاسی پہ دی سند نہ پوهیږی نومهربانی و کړی دخپل بوملگری یا خپلوان نه چه په انگریزی ژبه خبری کولای شی غوښتنه و کړی چه ستاسی له خوا ستاسی دسیمی تیریهود آفس یا هوزنگ تیم سره په تماس کی شی. بیا به مونږ ترجمان برابر کړو چه ستاسی سره کتنه و کړی.

PUSHTO

Tani waa muhiim. Hadii aadan fahmaynin warqadan fadlan waydiiso ruux saaxiibkaa ama qaraabadaada ah oo af ingiriiska ku hadla inuu kuu waco xafiiska Dariska (Neighbourhood Office) ama kooxda guryaha asagoo adiga kumatalaya. Markaa Kadib Ayaan kuu balaminaynaa Turjubaan.

SOMALI

یو دستاويز اهم ہے۔ اگر آپ اس دستاويز کو سمجھنے سے قاصر ہیں تو براہ کرم انگریزی زبان سے واقف اپنے کسی دو - یار شہد دار سے کہنے کہ وہ آپ کی جانب سے آپ کے مقامی نمبر ہوؤ آفس یا ہاؤسنگ ٹیم سے رابطہ کریں۔ ہم پھر آپ سے ملاقات کرنے کیلئے ایک ترجمان زبان کا انتظام کریں گے۔

URDU

Đây là việc quan trọng. Nếu quý vị không hiểu tài liệu này làm ơn nhờ bạn hay người thân biết nói tiếng Anh thay mặt cho quý vị liên lạc với đội nhà cửa hoặc văn phòng nhà cửa ở địa phương của quý vị. Chúng tôi sẽ thu xếp một thông dịch viên đến gặp quý vị.

VIETNAMESE

If you would like this leaflet in large print, Braille, or on audio cd or tape, please call 0121 303 1116.