Fire Safety in Care Homes: PEEPs, Compartmentation and Compliance

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Care homes face unique fire safety challenges due resident mobility and awarenesss. Learn. PEEPs, companentation, and compliance requirements

Care homes and other settings that look after people with limited mobility, cognitive impairment or sensory loss face fire safety challenges that do not exist in a typical office or shop. A resident with dementia may not understand a fire alarm, let alone respond to it, and a resident who relies on a wheelchair or hoist cannot self-evacuate down a stairwell. Getting fire safety right means designing

the building, the staffing rota and the evacuation strategy around the people who actually live there.

The Legal Framework and the Responsible Person

Fire safety in care homes in England and Wales is governed primarily by the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005, which applies to the premises rather than to the care provided. Under the Order, the responsible person, usually the provider or whoever controls the premises, must ensure a suitable and sufficient fire risk assessment is carried out, that general fire precautions are in place, and that staff are trained and kept informed.

In England this sits alongside the Care Quality Commission's requirements, including the fundamental standards in the Health and Social Care Act 2008 (Regulated Activities) Regulations 2014. Inspectors routinely ask to see fire risk assessments, evacuation plans and training records as evidence that a service is safe and well led. A home can be marked down on fire safety grounds even where no fire has ever occurred, because the paperwork and practical arrangements do not match what is expected.

Many care homes benefit from appointing a competent person, either an in-house manager with suitable training or an external specialist, to support the responsible person. Integral Safety's competent person service can support smaller providers without a dedicated fire safety manager.

Fire Risk Assessments: What a Compliant Assessment Looks Like

A fire risk assessment for a care home needs to go well beyond a generic office-style checklist. It must consider the evacuation capability of every resident, the layout and compartmentation of the building, staffing at all times of day and night, and whether detection and alarm systems suit people with sensory impairment.

There is no fixed legal interval for reviewing a fire risk assessment, but good practice points to a full review at least annually, and sooner after a change in resident dependency, building alterations, a fire or near miss, a change to staffing, or any intervention by the fire and rescue service. A compliant assessment should include:

- A written, dated assessment specific to the premises and resident group, not a generic template
- Clear identification of the responsible person and any delegated fire safety duties
- An action plan with named owners and realistic deadlines for any shortfalls
- Evidence that previous actions have actually been closed out, not just logged

Providers across Leicestershire and the wider East Midlands can commission an independent fire risk assessment rather than relying solely on an internal review, because someone with no day-to-day involvement in running the home can bring a fresh view.

Evacuation Planning: PEEPs and Horizontal Evacuation

Every resident should have a Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan (PEEP) setting out their mobility and sensory needs, the equipment and number of staff needed to move them, and the route they will take. For residents with advanced dementia or fluctuating capacity, the plan should allow for their needs on the worst day, not the best, and be reviewed more often. Grouping residents by dependency level can help set staffing and responsibilities for each area, but it does not replace individual plans.

Plans need reviewing whenever a resident's condition changes, after any fire-related incident or near miss, and when staffing patterns change, as well as at regular intervals. A PEEP describing a resident's mobility from six months ago may be dangerously out of date on the night it is needed.

Because simultaneous evacuation of a full care home is rarely realistic, many homes use progressive horizontal evacuation. This means moving residents away from the affected area into an adjoining fire-resisting compartment on the same floor rather than clearing the whole building at once. It depends entirely on the compartmentation holding up, and on having enough trained staff on duty to carry it out.

Compartmentation and Fire Doors: Common Failures

Compartmentation, meaning fire-resisting walls, floors, ceilings and doors that divide the building into separate cells, is what makes progressive horizontal evacuation possible. If a fire door is wedged open, or a cable penetration through a fire-rated wall was never properly sealed, the compartment will fail far sooner than intended, and the whole strategy collapses with it.

Inspections of care homes tend to find the same problems again and again, and most are straightforward to fix once identified:

- Fire doors propped open with wedges, extinguishers or furniture, often for ventilation or convenience
- Self-closing devices that have been disconnected, damaged or simply stopped working
- Gaps around door frames, or damaged intumescent strips and smoke seals
- Service penetrations for cables or pipework left unsealed after maintenance work
- Ceiling voids and risers never properly fire-stopped during construction or refurbishment

Door condition and compartmentation should be checked alongside the general fire risk assessment, because the two cannot sensibly be assessed apart. Integral Safety's fire risk assessments take both into account.

Detection, Alarms and Staff Training

Automatic fire detection should cover the whole premises, not just communal areas, and the system needs servicing and testing in line with the manufacturer's recommendations and the relevant British Standard, typically a weekly call-point test plus periodic servicing by a competent engineer. Because many residents have hearing impairment, visual and vibrating alarm devices are

worth considering for bedrooms.

All staff, including agency and bank staff, need fire safety training before being left on shift, covering fire prevention, what to do on discovering a fire, the home's evacuation strategy, PEEP awareness for the residents in their care, and the use of evacuation equipment such as evacuation chairs or sledges.

Integral Safety, an IOSH approved training provider, runs Fire Awareness training, which gives care home staff a foundation before home-specific evacuation drills build on it.

Night-Time Risk, Drills and Record Keeping

Fire risk is harder to manage overnight, because staffing is at its lowest while nearly all residents are in bed and less likely to notice early warning signs. A compliant arrangement needs enough waking staff to carry out the evacuation strategy in the fire risk assessment, not just enough to meet general care needs; those two numbers are not always the same. Night staff should know exactly where evacuation equipment is kept and how to use it.

Fire drills should be carried out regularly, including at night, with results recorded: how long the drill took, any problems found and what changed afterwards. A home that only drills during a weekday daytime shift has never tested its most vulnerable scenario.

Good record keeping underpins all of this, and an inspector or fire officer is likely to ask to see it early. At minimum, a care home should retain:

- The current fire risk assessment and a record of previous versions and review dates
- PEEPs for all residents, dated and signed off
- Training records for every member of staff, including agency and bank workers
- Fire drill records, including night-time drills
- Maintenance and servicing certificates for the fire alarm, emergency lighting, extinguishers and any suppression system
- A fire safety log book recording door checks, false alarms, and any faults found and rectified

Integral Safety, based in Coalville and working across the East Midlands, carries out fire risk assessments and helps care providers build practical, proportionate plans that reflect how the home actually operates. Visit our care homes sector page or get in touch for an independent review of your current arrangements.

Talk to Integral Safety Ltd

We are health and safety consultants based in Coalville, Leicestershire, working with businesses across the East Midlands. If anything in this guide applies to your workplace, we can help.

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This guide is general information about UK health and safety law and practice, correct as at 11 November 2026. It is not advice on your particular circumstances. The latest version is at https://integralsafetyltd.co.uk/blog/fire-safety-in-care-homes.