Albion Mercer

A FREE GUIDE FROM ALBION MERCER

Fire Safety for Holiday Lets

A practical guide for holiday-home owners, hosts and letting agents

Short-term accommodation, guest safety and your responsibilities explained.



For premises in England

November 2026

Does your holiday let need a fire risk assessment?

Paying guests may be asleep, unfamiliar with the property and unsure how to get out. Fire safety arrangements need to reflect that.

A holiday let is different from a private home

In England, fire safety law generally applies when a property is used for short-term paying guests. Advertising through Airbnb or another booking platform does not remove the need for a suitable fire risk assessment (FRA).

Who is responsible?

Owners, operators and letting agents can share responsibility, depending on which parts of the property and its management they control. Agree who arranges checks, maintains equipment, deals with faults and keeps records. Appointing an agent does not automatically transfer every duty.

Can you do the assessment yourself?

An owner with enough knowledge and experience may be able to assess a straightforward property using official guidance. You need to understand the building, recognise hazards and know when to seek specialist help.

When is professional help sensible?

Seek advice if escape is difficult, the layout is unusual or you are unsure whether walls, floors and doors would limit fire spread. Larger properties and accommodation above commercial premises can need more detailed assessment.

Keep a written record, however small the business.

Record the full assessment and your fire safety arrangements, act on the findings and keep them up to date.

Give guests early warning. Reduce the chance of fire.

The alarm system should suit the property and the people staying. One smoke alarm on the landing may not be enough. Page 8 explains which properties the government's small holiday-let guidance covers.

Smoke and heat alarms

For small properties covered by that guidance, the usual recommendation is linked smoke alarms in halls, landings, living rooms and bedrooms, with heat alarms in kitchens. They normally need mains power and a tamper-proof backup battery (Grade D1). Other rooms may also need alarms.

Make sure guests can hear the alarm

The alarm needs to wake sleeping guests, including behind closed bedroom doors. Deaf or hard-of-hearing guests may need other warning devices. Larger properties or more complex layouts can need a different alarm system.

Cooking & heating

Keep combustible items away from cooking appliances, heaters and stoves. Give guests clear operating instructions.

Electrical equipment

Keep wiring and supplied appliances in good condition. Remove damaged items and avoid overloaded sockets.

Smoking & charging

Set clear rules for smoking, candles, e-bike batteries and other charging risks.

Storage & waste

Keep linen, cleaning materials and rubbish away from ignition sources and escape routes.

An alarm does not make an unsuitable escape route safe.

Alarms, doors, fire-resisting walls and floors, and the way out all need to work together.

Can guests get outside quickly and safely?

Walk the route from each bedroom to a safe place outside. Think about how it would work at night, with smoke affecting part of the property.

Keep the way out clear

Guests should be able to open escape doors from inside without a key. Check gates and outside paths as well as the route inside. Keep furniture, luggage and cleaning equipment clear of the way out.

Check the doors protecting escape routes

Doors protecting stairs and halls need suitable fire resistance. Some existing solid doors that fit their frames well may be suitable in small properties. Have their suitability assessed before deciding whether they need replacing. Hollow doors, damage and unprotected glazing can require improvement.

Consider lighting if the power fails

Guests need to see the way out if the power fails. In the smallest properties, suitable rechargeable torches or night lights that operate on power failure may be acceptable. Ordinary plug-in night lights are not equivalent. Other properties need emergency escape lighting.

Look carefully at unusual layouts

Open-plan stairs, bedrooms reached through another room and sleeping rooms on upper floors can make escape more difficult. Have these layouts assessed before relying on them for guest accommodation. Do not rely on an upstairs window as the escape route for paying guests.

Check the shared arrangements if you let a flat.

Speak to the building manager about shared escape routes, entrance doors, communal alarms and what guests should do if there is a fire elsewhere in the building.

Tell guests what to do before they need to do it.

Simple instructions are especially useful when guests arrive late, stay briefly or have never visited the area before.

How to get out

Explain what to do on discovering fire or hearing an alarm, which exits to use and where to gather outside. Tell guests to stay outside until advised that it is safe to return.

How to call for help

Give the full address, postcode and any directions needed to find the entrance. Explain that a fire emergency requires a call to 999.

Safe use of the property

Explain safe use of heating and cooking appliances, smoking rules and why relevant doors should be kept closed.

Who to contact

Provide a reliable contact for defects, missing equipment or questions during the stay.

Make the information easy to find

Give guests clear instructions at check-in and display a fire action notice where they will see it. A welcome folder can provide more detail, but essential instructions should be easy to find.

Plan for different guests

Consider guests' mobility, hearing, sight, age and language. Ask about any help they may need before arrival and agree suitable arrangements. Guests must be able to get to safety without relying on rescue by the fire and rescue service.

> **Holiday flats need clear, building-specific instructions.**
>
> Explain what to do for a fire inside the flat and for a fire or alarm elsewhere in the building. Do not copy another property's evacuation policy.

Keep fire safety part of every changeover.

A written assessment is only useful if the precautions remain in place and defects are dealt with between bookings.

Before guests arrive

Check escape routes, exits, doors, alarms and escape lighting at each changeover. Where no owner or staff stay on site, repeat the weekly and monthly checks set out in the government guidance.

Between changeovers

Test smoke and heat alarms and escape lighting or torches monthly and at changeovers. Alarm systems with manual call points normally need weekly tests by someone who knows how to use them. Follow manufacturers' instructions during longer stays too.

Servicing and door checks

Routine tests do not replace servicing. Use suitable contractors to service fire safety equipment, and arrange regular door checks. Keep the reports and deal with any faults.

How often should the FRA be reviewed?

Review the assessment regularly, and sooner after alterations, changes to guest numbers or sleeping arrangements, a fire or another reason to think it is out of date. A completely new FRA is not automatically required every year.

Keep a useful record

Record checks, faults, repairs and completed FRA actions. Make sure cleaners and caretakers understand their checks and how to report faults.

> **Resolve serious safety concerns before the next stay.**
>
> Do not accept guests if you cannot keep them safe. Get advice promptly and put suitable safety measures in place before the accommodation is used.

What happens when you book an assessment?

We agree what needs assessing and how to access the property, then provide a written report explaining the findings.

01 Before the visit

Tell us the number of storeys, bedrooms and guests, the property layout and any known concerns. Share previous reports and available maintenance records.

02 At the property

The assessor considers accessible escape routes, fire precautions, hazards and management arrangements. We will explain which rooms and other areas we need to see. A gap between bookings is often a convenient time for the visit.

03 After the visit

Your report explains what was assessed, what needs attention and how urgently. It also identifies areas we could not inspect and anything that needs further investigation.

What other checks might be needed?

Electrical inspections, gas safety checks and alarm servicing remain separate. We may need their records to help assess the property. Hidden parts of the building may also need specialist investigation.

What if work is needed?

Deal promptly with urgent concerns. Arrange other work within the recommended timescales and keep records or photographs showing it has been completed. Ask for clarification where you need help understanding a recommendation.

You receive recommendations for your particular property.

Tell us about known concerns when booking so we can agree what the assessment needs to cover.

A short checklist for owners and agents

You do not need every record before making an enquiry. Let us know what you have and what is missing.

- Address, property type, number of storeys, bedrooms and maximum guests.
- Details of shared entrances, neighbouring occupancies and any unusual layout.
- Keys, codes and access to guest rooms and relevant service areas.
- Previous FRA, outstanding actions and available plans.
- Electrical Installation Condition Report (EICR), if available, plus alarm and lighting records.
- Details of recent alterations, known defects and guest evacuation arrangements.

Further information

The government's small holiday-let guidance covers simple ground-floor or two-storey properties sleeping up to 10 people, with no more than four first-floor bedrooms. It also covers individual flats, apart from unusually large ones. Unusual layouts, larger properties and more complex accommodation need different advice. Ask us if you are unsure which guidance applies.

01 / Making your small paying guest accommodation safe from fire

02 / Fire safety risk assessment: sleeping accommodation

03 / Holiday-let checks and fire precautions: Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service

04 / Fire Safety Order 2005 (as amended)

05 / Written assessments and shared responsibilities

06 / Means of escape for disabled people

Sources checked 22 October 2026. General information for premises in England. Requirements depend on the property and its use; this guide does not replace a property-specific FRA.

Albion Mercer

ABOUT ALBION MERCER

Fire safety advice for your holiday property

Albion Mercer provides fire risk assessments, fire-door inspections and practical fire safety advice for property owners and agents. We help you understand the precautions your holiday let needs, with clear findings and practical recommendations.

EXPERIENCE & CREDENTIALS

Lead assessor Ian Munro-Price has more than 25 years of property-industry experience. He is listed on the National Fire Risk Assessors Register (NFRAR) and is an Associate Member of the Institute of Fire Safety Managers.

CONTACT ALBION MERCER

Get a quote >

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Serving Dorset, South Somerset, Hampshire and surrounding areas

This guide provides general information for premises in England and is not a substitute for a property-specific fire risk assessment. Requirements depend on the building, its use and the people at risk. Official sources are linked on page 8. Sources checked 22 October 2026. Text updated 2 November 2026. Cover image is an AI-generated illustration.