Fire Precautions in Domestic Childminding Premises

A Guide for Childminders

Chief Fire Officers Association on behalf of the
Scottish Fire and Rescue Services in partnership with
The Scottish Commission for the Regulation of Care and
The Scottish Childminding Association
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1. Introduction - fire safety law and how this guide will help you comply with it

The Chief Fire Officers Association, together with the Care Commission and the Scottish Childminding Association (SCMA), have produced this guide for childminders. It sets out the fire precautions that you, as a childminder, must take in your home.

The Fire (Scotland) Act 2005 has recently been amended so we have produced this guide to help you make sure you comply with fire safety law. The Fire and Rescue Service enforce this law which places a duty on registered childminders to ensure fire safety where the childminding takes place in their home.

This guide applies to domestic childminding premises (your home) which are already registered or applying for registration. It does not apply to other types of childcare facilities.

Fire poses a serious risk and this guide will help you, your family and any staff to achieve a fire-safe environment in your premises. In this guide we tell you how to carry out a fire risk assessment. We tell you what you must do about escape routes, smoke alarms, firefighting equipment, sleeping accommodation and other general precautions. Also, at the back of this guide, we have included typical floor plans showing where you can place smoke alarms, heat detectors, fire blankets and extinguishers. These plans also show where you should have fire resisting doors and partitions.

Please read this guide all the way through. If you need more advice about fire safety and your obligations under the law, please contact your local Fire and Rescue Service – there are contact details at the back of this guide. If you carry out any work to bring your premises up to standard you should make sure it is done properly by someone who is competent.

The Care Commission expects you to undertake a fire safety risk assessment and carry out fire safety measures in order to be registered as a childminder. This applies equally to both new registrations and existing services. If you have any questions about what the Care Commission expects of you please contact your local Care Commission office for advice. If your premises are of a type or size not covered in this guide, please write to your local Fire and Rescue Service for advice. You can also find more information about fire safety law on the Scottish Government website www.infoscotland.com/firelaw
2. Fire safety risk assessment

As a childminder, you have a duty to protect anyone who is lawfully present on your premises, from harm caused by fire.

You must, by law, carry out a fire safety risk assessment. This is a crucial part of the overall safety policy for your premises. It is essential that the risk assessment you carry out is specific to fire safety and to the premises concerned. A general risk assessment will not be enough.

This part of the guide explains fire safety risk assessment and sets out a step-by-step guide to the process.

What is a fire safety risk assessment?

A fire safety risk assessment is an organised and methodical look at the premises, the activities within the premises, the potential for a fire to happen and the harm it could cause to the people in the premises. You will evaluate your existing fire safety measures to decide whether they are good enough or if more needs to be done. It is not enough to carry out your assessment once then forget about it – you must keep it under review and up to date.

When we talk about fire safety risk assessment:
• A hazard is a situation that can give rise to a fire.
• Risk has two parts:
  o likelihood that a fire may happen; and
  o consequence – the potential for a fire to cause death or injury.

You should look at both of these parts when you carry out a fire safety risk assessment.

When you carry out your fire safety risk assessment you will:
• identify hazards as far as possible and reduce the risk of them causing harm; and
• work out what fire safety measures you need to take to ensure the safety of people in the building in the event of a fire.
**How is a fire safety risk assessment carried out?**

There are 5 steps in the assessment process:

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**Figure 1: Five steps of the fire safety risk assessment process**

**Step 1: Identify people at risk**

You must assess who will be at risk if a fire happens. You will identify the number of people in the premises and where they will be. This will include the children you mind, their parents and your own family or staff.

You should take account of:

- the vulnerability and supervision needs of children;
- the lack of awareness and immaturity of young people;
- the mobility of young children, particularly babies and toddlers;
• children or parents who have some form of disability and may have difficulty understanding or reacting to a fire or in leaving the premises unaided.

**Step 2: Identify fire hazards**

You will identify potential ignition sources. This means the materials that might fuel a fire and the oxygen supplies which will help it burn.

For a fire to start, three things are needed: a source of ignition, fuel and oxygen. Think of these as a triangle of fire as shown in the picture below. If any one of the three components is missing, a fire cannot start. The steps you take to avoid the three coming together will reduce the chances of a fire.

**Figure 2. The triangle of fire**

![Diagram of the triangle of fire]  

**Identify sources of ignition**

Potential ignition sources are those where sources of heat could get hot enough to set fire to material in the premises. These sources could include:

- Smokers’ material such as cigarettes, matches and lighters;
- Electrical, gas or oil-fired heaters (fixed or portable);
- Cooking equipment;
- Lighting equipment;
- Faulty or misused electrical equipment.

Signs of ‘near-misses’, such as scorch marks on furniture or fittings, discoloured or charred electrical plugs and sockets, cigarette burns etc, can help you identify hazards.

**Identify sources of fuel**

Anything that burns is fuel for a fire. You need to find out if there is material in your home which will burn reasonably easily and is present in enough quantity to fuel a fire or cause it to spread to another fuel source. This applies to contents, fixtures and fittings and also to the structure of your home and the materials used to construct or line walls and ceilings such as polystyrene or tiles. How these fuels might help the spread of fire should be identified.
Some of the most common ‘fuels’ you may find are:
• textiles, soft furnishings and clothing;
• flammable liquids and solvents, for example white spirit, cooking oil and glue;
• seasonal or religious occasion decorations, for example paper chains;
• plastics and rubber, such as video tapes and upholstered furniture;
• waste material, particularly when finely divided such as shredded paper;
• flammable gases such as aerosols; and
• children’s art and craft work.

Identify sources of oxygen

The main source of oxygen for a fire is in the air around us. Air supply generally falls into one of two categories: natural air flow through doors, windows and other openings; or mechanical air conditioning and air handling systems.

Oxygen cylinders and apparatus pose a special hazard. High concentrations of oxygen can cause materials to burn extremely rapidly. Some materials which are not normally considered combustible, can burn in an atmosphere with a high concentration of oxygen. Oxygen is dangerous when it comes into contact with grease or oil.

Step 3: Evaluate the risk and decide if your existing fire safety measures are good enough

In Step 3 of the fire safety risk assessment you will assess the hazards and check that the fire safety measures you have taken will reduce the risks to an acceptable level.

Evaluate the likelihood of a fire starting

The chances of a fire starting will be low if there are few ignition sources and you keep combustible materials away from them. In general, fires start in one of three ways:
• accidentally, such as when pots are left unattended on a cooker;
• by act or omission (doing something you shouldn’t or not doing something you should), such as when electrical equipment is not properly maintained, for example an electric blanket; and
• deliberately, such as intentionally setting fire to outside storage or rubbish bins.

You should examine your premises very carefully to identify any potential accidents and any acts or omissions which might allow a fire to start. You should also look at how your premises may present an opportunity for deliberate fire setting.

Evaluate the consequence to people from a fire starting in the building

Once you have considered who might be at risk and what the chances are of a fire starting, you need to look at the extent of the actual risk to those people if a fire starts and spreads. When you evaluate the risk to people you must consider situations such as:
• fire starting on a lower floor affecting the escape routes for people on upper floors, especially where there is only one escape route;
• fire developing in a space that people have to pass by to escape from the premises;
• fires that may develop in unoccupied spaces; and
• fire and smoke spreading through the premises due to open doors, doors not fitted with self-closers, doors being wedged open or damaged doors.

Risk reduction

Fire safety law requires you to do certain things as part of your fire safety measures. These are:
• avoid risks;
• evaluate risks which cannot be avoided;
• combat risks where you find them;
• replace the dangerous with the non-dangerous or less dangerous; and
• give appropriate instruction to any staff you employ.

Avoid or reduce the hazards that may cause a fire

Once you have identified the fire hazards in Step 2, you should either avoid or remove them if it is reasonably practical for you to do so. If the hazards cannot be removed, you must take steps to reduce the risks.

Remove or reduce sources of ignition

There are various ways you can reduce the risks caused by potential sources of ignition, for example:
• replace naked flame and radiant heaters with a central heating system;
• restrict the movement of, and guard, portable heaters;
• enforce the smoking ban;
• ensure electrical and mechanical equipment is properly installed, used, maintained and protected by following the manufacturer’s instructions; and
• take steps to protect areas which could be vulnerable to deliberate fire raising.

Remove or reduce sources of fuel

There are various ways you can reduce the risks caused by materials which burn, for example:
• store flammable materials properly;
• remove combustible wall and ceiling linings, such as polystyrene or carpet tiles, to reduce the rate of flame spread and smoke production across surfaces;
• take steps to protect areas which could be vulnerable to deliberate fire raising; and
• make sure you do not allow waste materials and rubbish to build up and carefully store them until you can dispose of them properly.

Step 4: Record fire safety risk assessment information

You must make a written record of your fire safety risk assessment, including any action you have taken or will have to take to improve fire safety in the premises. Fire safety law says you must do this because you are registered by the Care Commission.
Step 5: Review of fire safety risk assessment

You should review your fire safety risk assessment regularly. If a fire or 'near miss' happens, this may mean that your existing assessment is inadequate and you should carry out a re-assessment. Identify the cause of any incident and then review and, if necessary, revise your fire safety risk assessment. If the Fire and Rescue Service has attended a fire in your premises, their findings may help you when you review your fire safety risk assessment.
3. Identifying which areas you use for childminding (child accommodation areas)

In this guide when we talk about fire protection we mean the walls, partitions and doors which form a physical barrier between the rooms of a home and the internal escape route, for example stairwells, corridors and hallways. This barrier will have a degree of fire resistance which will restrict the spread of fire, heat and smoke into the escape route and protect people during escape.

In order to find out if you have good enough fire protection you need to identify which areas of your home you use to provide your childminding service and make sure that they are adequately protected. We call these parts of your home child accommodation areas. Where the children you mind only visit other floors or areas to use the bathroom or toilet, or to accompany you while you do housework, these areas are not considered to be child accommodation areas.

Appendices A1 to C9 show examples of typical layouts of home types and show the acceptable standard of fire protection you should have if that room is a child accommodation area. If you have child accommodation areas which are not at the entrance level of your home, for example first floor bedrooms, then there will be a higher degree of risk and, this will mean you have to have a higher level of fire protection and we show this in some of the examples.

You should keep doors shut to rooms used to accommodate sleeping children (either for short naps or overnight) to prevent the spread of smoke should a fire happen. A baby alarm or similar device should be placed in all rooms where children are sleeping so that children will be heard without the need to keep doors open.

If you provide overnight sleeping accommodation there is a higher degree of risk as there is normally no waking adult supervision. Rooms used for overnight sleeping should have an automatic smoke alarm which is connected to the smoke alarm system (see Section 6 – Smoke alarms and Section 9 – Sleeping accommodation).
4. Fire resisting construction which protects escape routes

Where you need to have fire resisting construction, the minimum standard is:

Walls – 30 minutes fire resistance

Room doors – 30 minutes fire and smoke resistance and self closing

We have shown fire resisting structure (walls and doors) on the floor plans as double lines.

Where a stairway needs to be enclosed in fire resisting construction, any cupboards which open into the area of the stairway should either have a fire resisting door and walls (as shown in the floor plan B.3 Option A) or you should empty them and stop using them. You must not store combustible materials in stairways which have to be fire resisting.

Fire resisting doors should be self-closing or kept locked (cupboard doors and so on) and any glass above or to the sides of doors should be made fire resisting (minimum 30 minutes).

Any upgrading work should be carried out by a competent person who must provide you with a certificate or itemised receipt which details the standard of fire resistance achieved. Important – you may need a building warrant and you should contact your local Building Standards office for advice.
5. Securing doors

At the times you are childminding, the doors at any final exit such as front door, back door and so on should, where practical, be capable of being opened by an adult from the inside without using a key (for example using a handle, a turnbuckle (a lock that you turn) or similar). For security purposes you may have a security chain. This is the preferred standard, however some modern doors cannot be fitted with turnbuckles or other security devices. Where this is not practical and you need a key for security, all adults present must carry a key to the door with them at all times.

If any exit to your home leads into an enclosed garden or yard, then where possible, this area should have a door or gate you can go through to escape. If this is not possible then people must be able to escape to a point at least 10 metres away from the building.
6. Smoke alarms

You must have automatic smoke alarms to ensure that you are aware of a developing fire in your home. How many you need will depend on your fire safety risk assessment and on whether or not you provide overnight sleeping accommodation (where there is unlikely to be waking adult supervision). We have divided the rest of this Section into recommendations for:

a) premises that do not provide overnight sleeping accommodation
b) premises that offer overnight sleeping accommodation
c) general recommendations applicable to all systems.

a) Premises that do not provide overnight sleeping accommodation

The recommended minimum is a system which has one mains powered smoke alarm per floor of the building, each with an integral standby power supply (a battery inside the alarm). Where you have more than one smoke alarm, the alarms should be inter-connected to give early warning of fire in all the areas covered. Your home layout and the location of child accommodation areas will determine how many smoke alarms you will need. You should look at the room layouts for guidance on how many you should have for daytime use only.

The system you install should meet British Standard BS 5839: Part 6* for a type LD3 system with Grade D detectors. Grade D indicates that smoke alarms are mains-powered, each with an integral standby supply. LD3 indicates a system where detectors are in spaces that form part of the escape routes in the home. A type LD3 system is the minimum level of coverage for childminding services that do not offer overnight sleeping accommodation.

Premises that offer overnight sleeping accommodation

If you offer overnight sleeping accommodation there is a higher degree of risk, because of the reduced level of adult supervision, so an additional smoke alarm should be provided in all rooms used for overnight sleeping accommodation. You may wish to install a higher standard by providing smoke alarms in additional rooms. In either case, the additional smoke alarms should be interlinked with the system. The additional smoke alarms should be installed to the same standard as the originals.

General recommendations

The system should be installed by a competent person who should supply you with documentation to confirm that the system is working correctly and is installed in accordance with the British Standard. You will need a qualified electrician’s certificate when battery operated smoke detectors are replaced by a mains operated (hard wired) detection system. Important – you may need a building warrant and you should contact your local Building Standards office for advice.

In some situations where you cannot achieve the recommended level of fire protection in the escape route, you can compensate with an increased level of automatic detection. Situations
where you can use increased detection as compensation are shown as options on separate floor plans at the back of this guide.

Where the increased detection involves a kitchen, you should install an automatic heat detector instead of a smoke alarm to prevent nuisance operation during cooking.

The total system should meet the standards of BS 5839*: Part 6.

Where your premises are fitted with smoke alarms which are **battery powered** with **short-life batteries**, you should replace them with an upgraded mains operated system to the standard described above. For **new** registrations, this should be completed before registration is granted. In **existing** childminder premises this should be completed by **1st April 2009**.

If your premises are fitted with ten year smoke alarms with sealed battery units we recommend you replace them with an upgraded system to the standard described above when the smoke detectors reach the end of their working life or by 1st April 2009, whichever is the earlier date. This applies to both existing childminder premises and those applying for registration.

You should test your smoke alarms weekly by using the test button on each smoke alarm, and clean them annually according to the manufacturers’ instructions.

* As per current version of the British Standard.
7. Firefighting equipment

Although your priority when a fire happens is to safely evacuate the children in your care, you should have simple firefighting equipment for the use of adults only, to prevent small fires escalating and endangering people present. The number and type of firefighting equipment is determined by your fire safety risk assessment, based on the fire risk in your premises. However you should regard the following as a minimum level for average risk premises.

As a kitchen is normally the room of highest fire risk, you should have a fire blanket complying with British Standard BS EN 1869* located in the kitchen readily available for use. You should keep the fire blanket away from the main cooking area, on the escape route, with the fire blanket container positioned so that the blanket can be withdrawn quickly and easily.

As an alternative to a fire blanket, you may have a small dry powder or AFFF (Aqueous Film Forming Foam) fire extinguisher. A suitable size is 1kg dry powder or 2 litre AFFF extinguisher. They must comply with British Standard BS EN3 and have an extinguishing rating no lower than 5A.

You should maintain any extinguishers you have in accordance with British Standard BS 5306*: Part 3.

* As per current version of the British Standard.
8. General precautions

As part of your fire safety risk assessment you should assess and, if necessary, develop general fire safety precautions suitable for the risks in your premises. The following is a suggested list of precautions that you could include in your fire safety risk assessment.

a) A telephone should be easily available to contact the emergency services if you need to. You should make all adults who help you aware of the number to call in an emergency (normally 999).

b) You should not allow children into your kitchen during cooking activities, unless they are under strict adult supervision.

c) You should have fireguards, which conform to the appropriate British Standard, secured around:
   i. open fireplaces; and
   ii. any heater where the surface temperature could injure a child coming into contact with it.

d) Portable heaters using liquid petroleum gas, paraffin or electricity are not regarded as suitable forms of heating for childminding activities and we discourage their use. If you have to use them due to power cuts and so on, they should be securely anchored in a safe position and surrounded by an appropriate guard. They should not be situated in escape routes.

e) Gas taps should be shielded or secured so they can’t be tampered with.

f) If you offer sleeping accommodation, you should have a baby alarm or similar device so that you can hear children without needing to keep doors open. (See Section 9 – Sleeping Accommodation)

g) Everyone supervising children should be familiar with the escape routes and what to do in case of fire. Your instructions should include:
   • Get everyone out of the room where the fire has started and close the door to restrict the spread of fire and smoke.
   • Make sure that everyone is out of the house.
   • Have a pre-arranged assembly point, at a safe distance from the building and out of the way of the route that will be taken by fire engines and other vehicles, and stay there until the Fire and Rescue Service arrives.
   • Call the Fire and Rescue Service (dial 999) and give the full address of the premises and details of the fire.
   • Do not use a lift as a means of escape.
   • If any child has impaired mobility or needs to be carried, make sure all adults are familiar with any equipment you need to use.

h) Smoking materials hold a fascination for most children who may wish to imitate adults or play with cigarette lighters or matches. Cigarettes, lighters and matches should be kept out of sight and out of reach of children.
i) There should be no obvious defect in the electrical wiring system. Sockets and switches should be securely fixed to the wall. Electrical sockets in any rooms that the children have access to should be of the shuttered type or have safety covers fitted when not in use. Flex to electrical appliances should not be run under carpets. Fuses should be correctly rated for the appliance in use:

- Up to 700 watt – 3 amp fuse
- 701–1200 watt – 5 amp fuse
- 1201-3100 watt – 13 amp fuse

j) You can find home fire safety advice at [www.dontgivefireahome.com](http://www.dontgivefireahome.com) and [www.firekills.gov.uk](http://www.firekills.gov.uk)
9. Sleeping accommodation

Where children may be sleeping, you may need to take additional fire precautions. This will depend on the location of the sleeping accommodation and whether it is overnight sleeping or daytime naps.

If you provide overnight sleeping accommodation on a different floor level from the normal daytime child accommodation, then you should look at Section 4 - Fire Resisting Construction Protecting Escape Routes and the floor layouts in the Appendices to determine what level of protection you need for the means of escape from the sleeping area.

In existing registered childminding premises we recommend that additional smoke alarms, interconnected to the existing system, should be fitted in any area or room used by children for overnight sleeping.

For premises applying for a new registration the recommended benchmark standard is that additional smoke alarms, interconnected to the existing (or proposed) system, should be fitted in any area or room used by children for overnight sleeping purposes. This will provide supervising adults (who may also be asleep) with the earliest warning of danger. This benchmark standard should be in place before new services are registered. This standard may also be needed where a variation to an existing registration results in a significant increase in risk. (See Section 6 – Smoke Alarms.)

Where you provide sleeping accommodation, either for overnight sleeping or short naps, you should keep doors closed to restrict smoke and fire spread in the event of fire. You should have a baby alarm or similar device so that you can hear children without the need to keep doors open.
10. Appendices; list of floor plans

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<tr>
<td>C.9</td>
<td>Maisonette</td>
<td>Entrance Level–where rooms below</td>
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Using the floor plans

You should treat the floor plans as guides and not as literal representations of premises. For example plan diagram A.1 could be applied to premises with either one or four doors leading onto the hall.

Smoke alarm and heat detector positions shown on the floor plans represent only the general areas to be covered rather than the exact alarm locations. You should place alarms in accordance with the guidance in BS 5839 Pt. 6 (current version) and on the advice of the installer.

Structural fire protection shown on floor plans represents the provision of a fire resisting barrier between different risks in the building. The actual specification, location and construction you need to provide this barrier will depend on the existing construction and layout and should be determined by someone who is competent to do so.
1. Install at least one mains powered smoke alarm in entrance hall.
Appendix B2
Two storey detached/semi detached/terrace – child accommodation at entrance level

1. Install mains powered smoke alarms in ground floor entrance hall and upper floor level.
Appendix B3: option A – structural fire protection
Two storey detached/semi detached/terrace – child accommodation at upper level

1. All doors separating the entrance hall from rooms at entrance floor level to be fire resisting (minimum 20 minutes) and fitted with self closer.

2. Doors giving access to cupboards under stairs to be fire resisting (minimum 20 minutes) and kept locked, or the cupboard emptied out and not used.

3. Walls/partitions separating the entrance hall from rooms at ground floor level to be fire resisting (minimum 30 minutes).

4. Install mains powered smoke alarms in the ground floor entrance and upper floor level.
Appendix B3: option B – increased fire detectors
Two storey detached/semi detached/terrace – child accommodation at upper level

1. Install mains powered heat detector in kitchen and smoke alarms in the ground floor entrance hall, upper floor level and all ground floor rooms.
Appendix B4
Two storey (open plan) detached/semi detached/terrace – child accommodation at entrance level

1. Install mains powered smoke alarms in ground floor entrance hall and upper floor level.
Appendix B5
Two storey (open plan) detached/semi detached/terrace – child accommodation at upper level

1. Install mains powered heat detector in kitchen and smoke alarms in the ground floor hall and all ground floor rooms.
Appendix C6: Maisonette – Child accommodation at entrance level (where rooms above)

1. Install mains powered smoke alarms in ground floor entrance hall and upper floor level.
Appendix C7: option A – structural fire protection
Maisonette –
Child accommodation at upper level

1. All doors separating the entrance hall from rooms at entrance floor level to be fire resisting (minimum 20 minutes) and fitted with self closer.

2. Doors giving access to cupboards under stairs to be fire resisting (minimum 20 minutes) and kept locked, or the cupboard emptied out and not used.

3. Walls/partitions separating the entrance hall from rooms at entrance floor level to be fire resisting (minimum 30 minutes).

4. Install mains powered smoke alarms in entrance hall and upper floor level.
Appendix C7: option B – increased fire detectors
Maisonette –
Child accommodation at upper level

1. Install mains powered heat detector in kitchen and smoke alarms in entrance hall, upper floor level and all lower floor rooms.
Appendix C8: option A – structural fire protection
Maisonette –
Child accommodation at lower level

1. All doors separating the entrance hall from rooms at both upper and lower floor level to be fire resisting (minimum 20 minutes) and fitted with self closer.

2. Doors giving access to cupboards under stairs to be fire resisting (minimum 20 minutes) and kept locked, or the cupboard emptied out and not used.

3. Walls/partitions separating the entrance hall from rooms at entrance level and lower level to be fire resisting (minimum 30 minutes).

4. Install mains powered smoke alarms in entrance hall and lower floor level.
Appendix C8: option B – increased fire detectors
Maisonette –
Child accommodation at lower level

Install mains powered smoke alarms in entrance hall at lower floor level and in all rooms.
Appendix C9: option A – structural fire protection
Maisonette –
Child accommodation at entrance level (where rooms below)

1. All doors separating the entrance hall from rooms at entrance floor level to be fire resisting (minimum 20 minutes) and fitted with self closer.

2. Doors giving access to cupboards under stairs to be fire resisting (minimum 20 minutes) and kept locked, or the cupboard emptied out and not used.

3. Walls/partitions separating the entrance hall from rooms at lower floor level to be fire resisting (minimum 30 minutes).

4. Install mains powered smoke alarms in entrance hall and lower floor level.
Appendix C9: option B – increased fire detectors
Maisonette –
Child accommodation at entrance level (where rooms below)

1. Install mains powered heat detector in kitchen and smoke alarms in the entrance hall and lower floor level rooms.
Contact details

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