

Fire Risk Assessment and Fire Safety Guide

As a homestay host, ensuring fire safety is a key part of creating a secure environment for your students. A fire risk assessment is a simple process to identify potential fire hazards in your home, reduce risks, and develop an effective escape plan. Its purpose is not to be overwhelming, but to help you take practical steps to protect lives and minimise the chances of fire.

By completing a fire risk assessment, you can:

- Recognise areas of risk in your home.
- Implement changes to reduce or remove fire hazards.
- Ensure peace of mind with a clear and effective escape plan.

The aim of this guide is to walk you through the fire risk assessment process step by step, making it as simple and hassle-free as possible. It is followed by essential safety tips and practices to maintain a fire-safe home.

Conducting a Fire Risk Assessment

Step 1: Identify Fire Hazards

Take a walk around your home and make a note of potential fire hazards. Look for:

- **Electrical equipment:** Faulty wires, overloaded sockets, or damaged appliances.
- **Cooking equipment:** Gas stove, greasy hobs, or loose flammable items like tea towels.
- **Clutter:** Piles of paper, books, or other items that could fuel a fire or block escape routes.
- **Candles and open flames:** Candles or incense burners near curtains or in unstable holders.
- **Children or pets:** Matches, lighters, or candles within their reach.

Step 2: Assess Who Could Be Harmed

Consider who lives in your home and how they might be affected by fire hazards:

- Are there children, elderly, or disabled people who may need help evacuating?
- Would visitors or new homestay students be able to navigate the layout of your home and find escape routes immediately?
- Do you have pets that may be harder to evacuate?

Step 3: Reduce Risks and Take Action

Once you've identified risks, take steps to reduce them. Example of steps you can take include:

- **Clearing escape routes:** Ensure hallways, doorways, and stairs are clutter-free.
- **Installing/Testing smoke alarms:** Fit alarms on each floor and test them once a month.
- **Using safe practices:** If plug sockets are overloaded, divide chargers and other dividers across multiple sockets, and always turn them off when they are not being used.
- **Adding fire safety equipment:** Keep a fire extinguisher and fire blanket in the kitchen.
- **Securing hazardous items:** Store matches, lighters, and other ignition sources safely out of reach of children.

Step 4: Document and Share

Write down your findings and actions:

- Record potential hazards and the changes you've made to address these hazards on the Fire Risk Assessment Template. This needs to be uploaded to your PLUS dashboard, so that We can confirm the risk assessment has been carried out; this is legal requirement for hosting students.
- Ensure students are informed of the escape plan, as well as any potential fire hazards, on their first day of arrival, while you are showing them around your home.

Step 5: Regularly Review and Update

The risk of fire can change as your home changes. Regularly review your assessment:

- Update it after renovations, new furniture, or if new people move in.
- Check fire safety equipment regularly, replacing items as needed.

General Fire Safety Tips

1. **Cooking and Kitchen Safety:**
 - Never leave cooking unattended.
 - Keep flammable items like tea towels away from hobs and ovens.
 - Regularly clean cooking equipment and follow manufacturer instructions.
2. **Safe Use of Appliances and Electricals:**
 - Avoid overloading sockets and unplug devices when not in use.
 - Use genuine chargers and appliances to prevent overheating or electrical faults.
 - Regularly clean tumble dryer lint filters and ensure proper ventilation.
3. **Handling Open Flames:**
 - Extinguish candles and fires completely when leaving the room.
 - Keep BBQs, candles, and fire pits away from flammable materials.
4. **Keep Escape Routes Clear:**
 - Avoid clutter in hallways, doorways, and other exits.
 - Store large items like bikes away from main pathways.
5. **Household Items to Watch:**
 - Keep mirrors and glass away from direct sunlight to avoid accidental ignition.
 - Dispose of aerosol cans safely; avoid exposing them to heat or punctures.
6. **Child Safety:**
 - Store matches and lighters out of reach of children.
 - Teach children about fire safety in an age-appropriate way.
7. **Be Prepared for the Unexpected:**
 - Even with precautions, fires can happen due to factors beyond your control.
Always have a clear escape plan and ensure everyone knows how to call 999.

Emergency Actions During a Fire

1. If an alarm sounds:
 - Shout “FIRE” to alert others in the home.
 - Follow your escape plan and leave the property immediately.
 - Call 999 once safely outside.
2. If escape is blocked:
 - Stay in a safe room, close the door, and block gaps with soft materials.
 - Call 999, give your location, and signal for help through a window.

Common Causes of Fire to Watch Out For

- **Electrical Faults:** Regularly inspect wiring and appliances for damage.
- **Clutter:** Keep pathways and escape routes free from items that can block access or fuel fires.
- **Decorations:** Avoid placing flammable items like paper decorations or dry plants near heat sources.
- **Cooking Accidents:** Pay close attention while cooking and ensure equipment is in good working order.
- **Carelessness with Flames:** Be cautious with candles, BBQs, and any open flames.

Additional Tips for Fire Safety

- **Install Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarms:** Test alarms monthly and replace batteries when needed.
- **Keep a Fire Blanket or Extinguisher:** These should be in accessible areas, especially in the kitchen.
- **Educate Guests and Family Members:** Ensure everyone knows escape routes, where keys are kept, and what to do in an emergency.

By taking these precautions, you can significantly reduce the risk of fire in your home and provide a safe, welcoming environment for your homestay students.