



SECURED BY DESIGN

Arson Prevention Advice



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government



Secured by Design

Official Police Security Initiative



NFCC
National Fire
Chiefs Council



Deliberate fire-raising, or arson as it is commonly referred to throughout the United Kingdom, is a serious threat to all premises. This guide outlines the importance of designing and protecting against arson. It is aimed at providing the designated 'Responsible Person' (RP) (under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 for high-rise residential buildings.

A detailed overview of arson statistics and related incidents across the United Kingdom can be found within the [National Fire Chiefs Council \(NFCC\) Arson Reduction Strategy 2023 - 2026](#).

This document was developed with the support of the NFCC and the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG).

Scope of document

This guide does not cover every eventuality but will assist in reducing the common factors which create opportunities for arson, both at the premises and within the surrounding grounds. Where required, such recommendations may support the fire risk assessment.

These measures can also assist in preventing other crime types, such as burglary, theft, vehicle crime, criminal damage and anti-social behaviour and can be linked to the statutory responsibilities for Fire and Rescue Services and other specified authorities, including the Police Service, contained within the [Serious Violence Duty](#).

Specialist advice should be sought if there are specific arson risks associated with the premises and more detailed advice on fire safety can be found within the '[Fire Safety in Blocks of Flats' \(FSBF\)](#) guidance document. Further advice on crime prevention and designing out crime security mitigation measures, can be found via the [UK Police Service, Secured by Design \(SBD\) website](#). The potential benefits of incorporating SBD guidance, is supported within the NFCC Arson Reduction Strategy 2023 – 2026.

Residential high-rise buildings and flats are potential targets for deliberate acts of arson and as such signify a serious threat to safety. It is therefore essential that the RPs considers arson within the wider fire risk assessment process undertaken for the premises in compliance with national legislation. Qualified guidance and advice must be sought when conducting risk assessments. Further information on this subject can be found on your FRS website and the [Fire Protection Association \(FPA\)](#).

It is imperative that the RPs imparts arson prevention advice/information to the building's occupants to ensure that they are aware of how they can assist in supporting and maintaining a safe environment and reducing the opportunity for arson to be committed. This information can be given in newsletters and/or at residents' meetings, etc. to assist in developing awareness and managing expectations when it comes to recommendations such as removing potential features which may be vulnerable to arson, what to do in the event of a fire or the need to evacuate.

It cannot be stressed enough that the possibility of a deliberate arson attack should form part of the fire risk assessment. Qualified advice and guidance must be sought. The following link provides further information about [fire risk assessments](#).

Security measures

One of the best ways to prevent arson is making sure your property is secure, including any satellite buildings such as bin stores, bicycle stores and unused / derelict buildings. However, it is essential that any implemented security measures should not compromise the means of escape – the routes and doors that occupants need to use to get out of a building in an emergency.



Keep entry points to the apartment building secure, including bin stores, cycle storage facilities, perimeter walls, fencing and gates. It is imperative that the RP clearly educates residents, in the expected required action, where issues are identified. This will ensure that residents know how to report it immediately to the RP and/or building managing agent to resolve. This will ensure that the opportunity for unauthorised access by an opportunist trespasser/arsonist are reduced.



Prevent intruders and trespassing by making sure building perimeters and buildings are well maintained and any damage is repaired as soon as possible i.e. fixing fences or the security system that controls door access into the building.



Where access control measures are in place to assist in compartmentation of the apartment block, residents should be instructed that doors should not be propped/wedged open (consider an alarm notification system which alerts the building management team should a door be propped/wedged open). The residents should be made aware that such actions can compromise fire compartmentation, which will assist in protecting them in the event of a fire. They should also be made aware that where doors have an access control feature to prevent unauthorised access into secure areas/zones of the building, such actions could compromise the security of the building.



Where these doors are damaged, residents should be made aware of the process for reporting these issues immediately to the managing agent/ RP for the building. This will assist in reducing the opportunity for unauthorised/ unchecked access throughout the apartment block.



Where installed, consider the removal of a tradesperson or timed-release mechanism facility (features which allow the circumnavigation of entrance door access control and allow casual access into the building) on a communal doorset, because they are proven to be the cause of anti-social behaviour and unlawful access to apartment buildings and associated communal areas. They can provide a legitimate cover story/excuse for an unauthorised person to be present i.e. delivering a parcel, takeaway or visiting a friend for example.



Casual access can also contribute to a lack of ownership and capable guardianship for the residents due to an unauthorised person being able to gain access to the building and not look out of place. This reduces the ability of the resident to offer some informal policing of the premises, and creates an environment where the potential arsonist/criminal can move throughout the building unchecked.



Residents should be encouraged not to allow unknown persons without a valid access control credential for the building to tailgate them through a communal entrance. This will add an element of capable guardianship of the building and reduce unauthorised persons gaining access into the building.



Consider installing security systems such as Video Surveillance Systems (VSS), intruder alarms and security lighting. Such facilities can assist in securing the premises and allow the detection of unauthorised access in parts of the building the intruder shouldn't be in. They can also contribute to deterring potential criminal acts, respond to a situation and enable law enforcement to investigate an incident if CCTV (VSS) images are captured.



Keep flammable substances stored safely and securely, not left in the open. Consider whether there is a need to store such substances at the building at all?



Internal storage cupboards must be kept locked at all times and the credentials that allow access, must be kept secure at all times, with access only available to those who have a legitimate reason to do so.



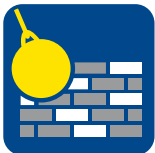
Consider fitting a fire resistant letterbox certified to the Door and Hardware Federation's Technical Specification (DHF TS) 008. It is essential that where any hardware is fitted to any fire door it should not compromise the doors fire integrity, security performance and smoke control capability.



Where possible, mail should be contained in a designated secure area on the ground floor (a secure external letterbox meeting the requirements of the DHF TS 009 or delivery 'through the wall' into a secure location of the apartment block), where it can easily be monitored by a VSS and where a fire suppression system/sprinkler system can be deployed. Such features will reduce the opportunity for unauthorised visitors to gain access into the building by pretending to be delivering post or similar.



The benefits of fostering an effective on-going relationship between the residents and the managing agent will greatly assist in supporting the management and the upkeep of the premises. An example of this could be ongoing training and awareness about the firefighting equipment (FFE), where it is cited, maintained and ready to use throughout the common areas of the building. This could include fire alarms, fire extinguishers, fire sprinkler systems (or other associated fire suppression measures), and advice around how to report any damage to such equipment, either accidental or deliberate to the RP/building managing agent. This will ensure that safety features are not compromised, and such equipment is available and defect free in the event of an incident.



Consider demolishing any unused or derelict buildings within the grounds.



Where there are unoccupied buildings across the complex, which are not going to be demolished, then it is imperative that the RP considers and mitigates any identified risks and required management of these buildings.



RPs should understand the importance of regular building inspections, supported with a check list that identifies key considerations that may relate to the fire risk assessment, features which are key in the day to day operation of the building or concerns raised by residents. This inspection should cover both internal and external areas. Having a regular formal routine inspection process in place will help identify issues which need addressing i.e. repairs to a fence, doors not closing properly, fire doors being wedged open or in need of maintenance.



Where there are high levels of anti-social behaviour and crime, it is recommended that the RP considers utilising security patrols to assist in deterring such threats and opportunities. Liaison with the local police neighbourhood team is also recommended, who may be able to offer a visible presence and support.



Where locations at the building are defined arson high-risk areas, the introduction of water suppression systems can add a significant safety feature to these areas e.g. bin stores. Such areas should also have Automatic Fire Detection measures in place and be supported with a monitoring and management programme.

External open spaces around the apartment block, including car parks and outbuildings

Open spaces can provide an opportunity for arson if left unmaintained and unkempt. It is everyone's responsibility to assist in keeping locations safe and secure. Where issues are observed, report to the RP and/or managing agent to get the issue resolved immediately and reduce/remove the opportunity for arson.



Keep any paths well maintained, with foliage, grasses, bushes and trees well-trimmed. This will assist in enabling the fire and rescue service vehicle to gain unobstructed access to the building and stop the spread of any fire. This can also enable paths to be used as a fire break, to delay the spread to and from the building.



It is essential that the installation and enclosure of any boundary fence and supporting gate should not compromise the means of escape for residents to reach a place of ultimate safety, for example a padlocked gate, which cannot be opened without the aid of the key.



Where fencing is being replaced or newly installed, the RP is advised to consider the type of fencing. Certain types of fencing have contributed significantly to the spread of fire, for example, there have been safety alerts issued by Fire & Rescue Services regarding the use of certain composite fencing. Further information on this subject can be found via the following link [Fire & Rescue Composite Fencing Safety Advice](#).



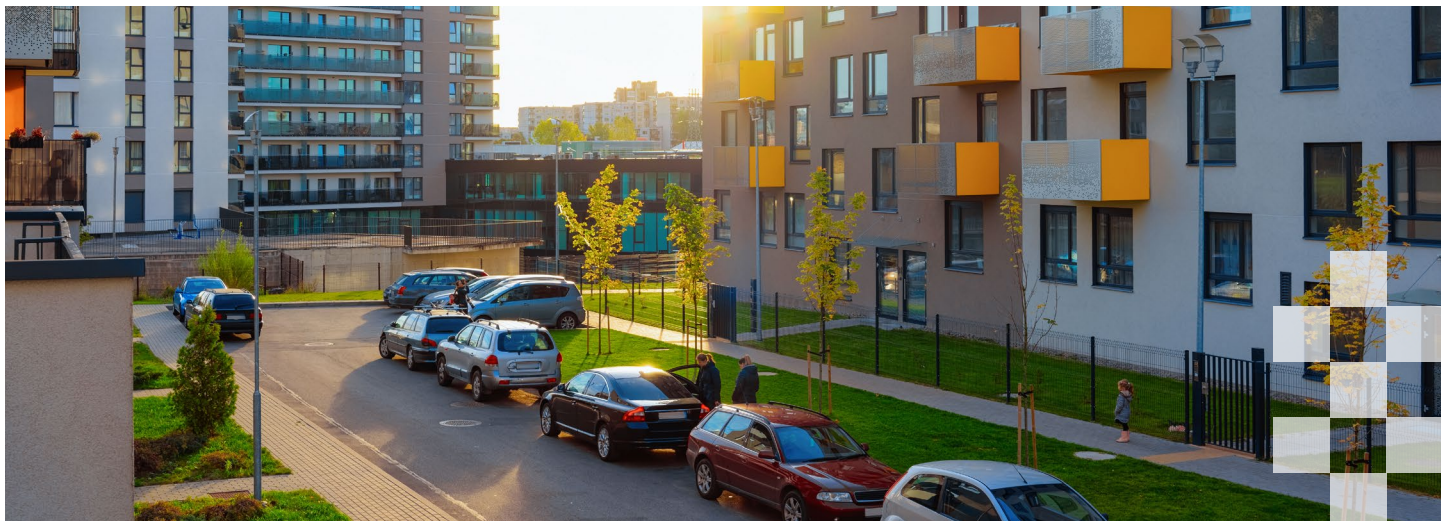
Ensure there are no gaps, holes, damage or informal access points in perimeter walls, fencing or other boundary treatments. Where such breaches are noticed, residents must be encouraged to report this to the RP or building managing agent.



Where gates control access into the grounds of the residential apartment, ensure that it is communicated to the residents that they must not be wedged open, and that they must report any faults as soon as they arise, for example, if a gate fails to lock and remains insecure.



Any outbuildings within the boundary must be securely locked. Where outbuildings are of lightweight construction, for example, timber walls or felt roofing, it is often the case that these buildings contain items that can be helpful to a potential arsonist, thief or vandal as they are frequently used to store tools, ladders, and flammable liquids and material. Therefore, any ladders stored within such buildings should be secured using good quality chains and padlocks, and tools and/or flammable materials removed to a more secure location. Further advice on security products can be found at www.securedbydesign.com.



Rubbish

Rubbish is a ready source of fuel for an arsonist. Fires involving rubbish can quickly spread within a building and put the residents' lives at risk.

- 1** Communal bin stores should be secured by access control to reduce unauthorised access to areas which potentially contain material that could be used in an arson attempt, without being seen or heard.
- 2** Bin stores should be constructed from fire-resistant material.
- 3** Metal bins with lockable lids will help prevent access to the potentially flammable contents within.
- 4** It is advisable that bin stores are well-lit and where possible covered by a VSS. Ideally, they should also be covered by active surveillance for residents, to add an element of capable guardianship, which may result in an unlawful act being detected and an immediate response facilitated.
- 5** Rubbish or recycling containers should be placed on firm, solid ground and regularly emptied. Only put rubbish and recycling containers out on collection days.
- 6** Where separate bins are placed out for collection by the local council, these should only be put out on the day of collection and then collected immediately and returned back to safe storage, to reduce the potential opportunistic target for an arsonist.
- 7** If a bin collection is missed, you should contact your local council to report it so that this can be resolved immediately, to prevent the build-up of material which could be a target for arson.
- 8** It is essential that an ethos of good housekeeping and building operational practices are enforced and maintained by all residents and the management company, both within the internal and external environments of the block. Never store rubbish, flammable material, electric mobility scooters, and/or electric bikes which can self ignite, in corridors, stairwells, escape routes or communal areas around the apartment block.
- 9** Recycling containers should be stored a safe distance away from the buildings.
- 10** Skips should be located well away from the building with residents or other users being instructed not to overload them. Skips must be removed immediately when full.
- 11** Where large items like furniture (mattresses or settees for example), old vehicles or rubble can provide a fuel source, the resident must be made aware to contact their local council for advice on removal of bulky waste, so that a potential target is removed and not left in situ for an opportunistic arson attack.



**For further security advice, please contact your local
Police Crime Prevention Officer or Designing Out Crime Officer.
For advice on fire prevention and other associated issues,
contact your local Fire & Rescue Service.**

This guidance document was developed
with the help and advice of the following:



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