Housing Rights

https://www.housingrights.org.uk/landlords/getting-started-landlord/rental-property-standards

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Rental property standards

This information is for private landlords of properties in Northern Ireland.

If you are a tenant, you can find advice here.

If you are a landlord or letting agent in Northern Ireland seeking advice, you can:

- send a message to Landlord Advice, or
- call 028 90 245 640 (Option 1)

Landlords are responsible for making sure rental properties meet minimum fitness and safety standards. This means you must follow certain laws to make sure the property is safe for your tenants.

If your tenants think the property is unsafe, they can report the issue to the environmental health department of their local council.

Basic fitness standards

For a rental property to meet minimum fitness standards, it must have:

- working drains
- a piped supply of drinking water
- an easily accessible toilet and wash hand basin
- either a bath or shower with hot and cold water
- adequate facilities for lighting, heating and ventilation
- proper space to prepare and cook food, including a sink

The property must not:

- be in serious disrepair
- have structural problems
- have dampness which could impact occupiers' health

If your property was built before 1945, you must apply for a fitness certificate to prove it meets these standards, unless:

- the Housing Executive gave you a renovation grant within the last 10 years, or
- your property is a registered or licensed house in multiple occupation (HMO)

If you plan to rent your property as a HMO, you must comply with additional standards. A HMO is a property rented to three (or more) people from three (or more) separate families or households.

Environmental health department inspection

If your tenants think the property falls below these standards, or is unsafe, they can ask the environmental health department to inspect it.

An environmental health officer will visit the property to carry out a fitness inspection.

Depending on how serious the issue is, the council may first try to deal with the issue informally. The officer will encourage you to carry out repairs within a reasonable timeframe.

If you do not respond or complete the repairs needed, the council can serve you a notice of unfitness or of disrepair.

Failing the fitness inspection

If your property fails the inspection, the council will serve you with a notice of unfitness. Your tenants will also get a copy of this notice.

If you are served a notice of unfitness, the amount of rent you can charge will be restricted.

Passing the fitness inspection but property in disrepair

If the officer determines that the property meets basic fitness standards, but is in a state of disrepair, they can issue a notice of disrepair. Your tenants will also get a copy of this notice.

Being served a notice of disrepair does not affect the amount of rent you can charge

Carrying out repairs and reinspection

The notice you get will include:

- a list of repairs you must carry out to bring the property up to standard
- the deadline to finish the work by

The deadline should be at least 21 days from the date on the notice. The council should reinspect the property after the deadline passes. They will check if the work has been properly carried out.

If you have not completed the work, the council may decide to take enforcement action against you. This could lead to a costly court case.

Smoke, heat and carbon monoxide alarms

The law has changed for smoke, heat and carbon monoxide alarms in private rentals in Northern Ireland.

These new regulations mean that landlords must install and keep in working order smoke, heat and carbon monoxide alarms in all properties they rent out to tenants.

Important dates for compliance

The regulations come into operation on:

- 1 September 2024 for all new private tenancies granted on or after this date
- 1 December 2024 for existing tenancies granted before 1 September

Your responsibilities as a landlord

The new regulations mean that as a landlord, you are responsible for installing and keeping in working order alarms that detect heat, smoke, and carbon monoxide in any property you rent to tenants.

You must ensure you install a smoke alarm in:

- the room most frequently used by occupants for example the main living room
- every circulation space (hall, stairs, landing) on each floor

If fitting a smoke alarm would not be practical due to being too close to an open fireplace, then you may fit a heat alarm instead.

If the main living room is an open-plan living room / kitchen area you may install a heat alarm instead of a smoke alarm, provided the heat alarm is installed in a position no more than 7.5 metres from any point in the room.

You must ensure you install a heat alarm in:

- every kitchen

You must ensure you install a carbon monoxide alarm in:

- any room or circulation space which contains a fixed appliance (excluding gas cookers /gas ovens) where any fuel is burnt (e.g. boiler, fire, heater, stove)
- any room a flue from a fixed appliance or a chimney from an in use fireplace passes through

You must repair or replace any faulty alarms within the property. All alarms installed in the property must be marked or referenced as British Standard compliant.

You must replace all alarms before the manufacturer’s specified date of expiry.

Requirements for alarms

You must ensure smoke and heat alarms are installed and maintained in accordance with the British Standard and ensure that they are interlinked.

Carbon monoxide alarms must be installed and maintained in accordance with the British Standard but do not need to be interlinked.

You must ensure that the installed alarms are either hard-wired or battery sealed, or a combination of both. Note that if an alarm is hard-wired but has a back-up battery to account for power cuts, the back-up battery does not need to be sealed.

British Standards

Below are links for assistance with the British Standards

Smoke and Heat Alarms

Carbon Monoxide Alarms

More advice

- Certificates and safety checks
- HMO licensing
- Rent control