

Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS)

A Guide for Landlords, Managing Agents and Tenants

The Housing Health and Safety Rating System is the assessment procedure for residential properties.

What is HHSRS?

The Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) is a way of assessing residential properties.

It was introduced by the Housing Act 2004 and came into force in 2006.

The key principle of the system is to consider the health and safety of the people living in these properties in relation to 29 hazards. These include damp and mould; excess cold; fire; falls; and electrical hazards.

Why is it needed?

The principle behind HHSRS is that homes and their surrounding spaces should provide a safe and healthy environment for occupiers and visitors.

HHSRS looks at the defects to a property and relates these to health and safety hazards. The system then helps to avoid or minimise potential hazards.

Who does it affect?

The new system affects all owners and landlords, including social landlords. Private landlords in particular should be aware that **any future formal inspections of their property will be made using the Housing Health and Safety Rating System.**

Landlords should constantly review conditions at their properties to see where and how they can be made safer.

How does it work?

A safety assessment of the property is carried out. This has two parts - firstly, if the inspectors see a defect, they look at the likelihood of an incident arising over the next 12 months. They then determine what the likely harmful outcome would be. For example, how likely is a fire to break out and what will happen if it does?

The assessment will look to identify serious (**category 1**) hazards and other less serious (**category 2**) hazards.

Government guidance (which uses statistical information gathered from accident and emergency departments) gives more weight to those hazards that are either more likely to occur or are more harmful to the occupants. It also takes into account the age and type of property.

How is it enforced?

If a local authority discovers serious (category 1) hazards in a home, it has a **duty** to take the most appropriate action. For less serious hazards they have a **power** to take action. They will generally try to deal with problems informally. But, if this is unsuccessful, they might take one or more of the following five actions involving service of a **statutory notice** under the Housing Act:

Hazard Awareness Notice

This notice does not formally require action by the person served with it. It merely brings a problem to their attention.

Improvement Notice

This notice would require a landlord to carry out improvements to the property. For example, by installing heating and insulation to deal with cold or mend a leaking roof which is causing dampness.

Prohibition Order

This order prohibits the use of all or part of the dwelling, prohibits the use of an installation such as a faulty cooker, or restricts the number of occupants.

Emergency action

If the council feel that there is an **'Imminent risk of serious harm'** to the occupants, they can serve an Emergency Remedial Action Notice and carry out works themselves (recovering the costs later from the owner), or immediately prohibit the use of all or part of a dwelling with an Emergency Prohibition Order.

Demolition Orders and Clearance Areas

In extreme cases the council may consider demolition or clearance of a dwelling or an area.

All of these actions will result in the service of a **statutory notice**, which is a legal document.

What are the penalties?

With the exception of a Hazard Awareness Notice, failure to comply with a statutory notice could lead to prosecution and a fine of up to £5,000.

The local authority could also carry out the work itself and recover the costs.

What if I disagree with the assessment?

A property owner who feels that an assessment is wrong can discuss matters with the inspector and ultimately can appeal against service of a Notice through the Residential Property Tribunal.

Residential Property Tribunals are formal panels but unlike courts, owners and local authority officers do not have to be represented by lawyers.

What are the hazards?

The system deals with 29 hazards, listed at the end of this document and summarised as follows:

- **Dampness, cold or excess heat**
- **Pollutants** e.g. asbestos, lead, gas escapes
- **Space, security, light, noise**
- **Hygiene, sanitation and water supply**
- **Accidents** – falls; electric shocks, fires, burns & scalds; collisions, cuts & strains

Dampness, cold or excess heat

Damp and mould growth threaten health due to the presence of mould or fungal growths (hazard 1).

Therefore the property should be free from rising damp, penetrating damp (due, for example, to broken gutters), and there should be no persistent condensation which is caused by structural issues or lack of heating.

The health effects of **Excess cold** include respiratory conditions and an increased risk from heart attack and stroke (hazard 2).

There should be a safe, well-maintained, controllable heating system throughout the dwelling and adequate thermal insulation.

Excess heat in the home can cause dehydration and can increase the risk of conditions such as stroke and breathing disorders (hazard 3).

It is therefore important to have controllable heating and adequate ventilation.

Pollutants – asbestos, biocides, carbon monoxide, lead, radiation, gas escapes, volatile organic compounds

Inhalation of **Asbestos** fibres or **manufactured mineral fibres** such as those used for loft insulation have known health effects (hazard 4). Asbestos should be sealed by paint to prevent the release of fibres and clearly labelled. Rockwool should be used only in inaccessible areas. It may be necessary to have damaged asbestos removed by a licensed contractor.

There are threats to health from the **biocides** that have been used to treat timber (hazard 5) and from the **volatile organic compounds** that are given off from paints and glues (hazard 10).

Therefore timber treatment products, glues and solvents should be used only in well-ventilated rooms.

Carbon monoxide and fuel combustion products such as nitrogen dioxide and smoke can be extremely toxic (hazard 6). Fuel-burning appliances must therefore be properly installed and maintained, with adequate ventilation where necessary.

Lead poisoning can be prevented by replacing lead pipe-work to drinking water systems and by painting over old lead paintwork (hazard 7). In certain parts of the country there are cancer risks from **radon** gas (hazard 8)

Exposure to escaped **gas** can cause asphyxiation (hazard 9). Gas appliances must be safely installed and checked **annually**.

Space, security, light and noise

There are health implications related to a **lack of space** for living, sleeping and normal family life (hazard 11). This can lead, for example, to poor hygiene and an increased risk of accidents.

There should be no more than two people sharing a bedroom and the layout of rooms should not impact on the privacy of the occupants.

The fear of **entry by intruders** can cause stress and anguish, as well as the actual harm and injury that may be caused by intruders (hazard 12).

Doors should therefore be strong, secure and well-lit. Ideally they will have spy holes and door chains. Windows should have suitable locks.

Lack of **light** can lead to eyestrain, stress and depression (hazard 13). Therefore all rooms, including basements, should have adequate natural and artificial light, especially to work areas such as the kitchen.

Exposure to **noise** can cause sleep disturbance, headaches and anxiety (hazard 14). Internally there should be adequate sound insulation between different dwellings and to bedrooms or living rooms that are next to bathrooms and WC compartments.

Accommodation along busy roads may require double or secondary glazing.

Hygiene, sanitation and water supply

These hazards can lead to illness ranging from mild stomach upset to severe gastro-intestinal disease.

Problems with **hygiene, pests and storage of rubbish** can be a threat to health because insects, rats and mice are known to spread disease and lead to cross-contamination (hazard 15).

Dwellings should be maintained in a hygienic condition with no cracks, holes or voids that would allow entry or shelter of pests. There should be adequate facilities for the storage of rubbish.

The **safe preparation of food** will minimise infections that arise due to poor facilities for the storage, preparation and cooking of food (hazard 16). Kitchens need to have washable surfaces and be in good repair with adequate lighting and ventilation.

There should be a sink with hot and cold water, sufficient cupboards for storage, an adequate worktop and space for a cooker and a fridge.

Personal washing facilities - especially being able to wash hands after using the toilet - are a major contributor to the health and well-being of occupants (hazard 17).

Baths, basins and toilets should have a surface that is easy to keep clean, with a continuous supply of hot and cold water. They must be properly connected to a well maintained drainage system. There should be space for a washing machine and ideally, a way to dry clothes.

An adequate, wholesome **water supply** is required for drinking and other domestic uses (hazard 18). The cold tap to the kitchen sink should come directly from the mains and be at an adequate pressure. Water tanks, for example those located in lofts, should be covered.

Accidents – falls; electric shocks, fires, burns & scalds; collision, cuts & strains

Falls include those associated with baths and slippery showers (hazard 19), door thresholds or single steps causing trips (hazard 20), and falls down stairs (hazard 21), over low balconies or out of windows (hazard 22).

All of these cause physical injuries, cuts and bruising. Non-fatal falls can cause head and spinal injuries.

Baths and showers should have a slip resistant surface and if not, they should have grab rails.

Floors and paths should be in good repair and free from serious trip hazards. Stairs should have even tread heights, be enclosed by balusters and have adequate handrails.

Guarding should prevent falls over balconies and landings, and low windows should have locks or catches that prevent children from climbing out or should be restricted from opening too wide.

Electric shock and burns can result from exposure to defective wiring in the home (hazard 23).

Therefore electrical installations should be safe with sufficient numbers of well-sited sockets.

Fire in the home can cause burns and smoke inhalation (hazard 24). Again, the electrical installation must be safe and in good repair, heaters and cookers should be safely sited away from flammable materials and there should be doors to all rooms, especially kitchens. Smoke alarms should be fitted, to give early warning in the event of a fire.

Burns and scalds can occur if cookers are badly located, resulting in hot liquid spills or contact with flames as occupants go past (hazard 25). Ideally, cookers should be sited in the middle rather than at the end of a run of kitchen units and hot pipes or radiators may need to be guarded to protect young children from burns.

Other accidents include **collision** with low doorways, or windows that open into passageways (hazard 26); and **entrapment**, where fingers or other body parts get trapped when windows and doors don't open and close easily (also hazard 26).

Safety glass should be fitted to glazed doors and low level panels where children might fall onto them. Although rare, the effects of an **explosion** are severe (hazard 27).

If the **position and operability of amenities** is poor, this can cause strains and sprains (hazard 28). So, basins, sinks, worktops and baths should be convenient to use and windows should be easy to reach.

In extreme cases, poor maintenance or inadequate fixings to a building can lead to **structural collapse** (hazard 29). Regular maintenance of a property will prevent tiles or slates from falling from a roof, and will prevent ceilings or kitchen cupboards from falling down.

More information

The Department for Communities and Local Government has issued guidance on HHSRS for landlords and other property related professionals. This can be viewed and downloaded at www.communities.gov.uk

You can also get more information from the Private Sector Housing team by calling us on 01273 293156 or by emailing psh@brighton-hove.gov.uk

The 29 hazards are:

Dampness and temperature

1. Damp and mould
2. Excess cold
3. Excess heat

Pollutants

4. Asbestos MMF
5. Biocides

6. Carbon monoxide and fuel combustion products
7. Lead
8. Radiation
9. Uncombusted fuel gas
10. Volatile organic compounds

Space, security, light and noise

11. Crowding and space
12. Entry by intruders
13. Lighting
14. Noise

Hygiene, sanitation and water supply

15. Domestic hygiene, pests and refuse
16. Food safety
17. Personal hygiene, sanitation and drainage
18. Water supply for domestic purposes

Falls

19. Falls associated with baths etc.
20. Falls on the level
21. Falls associated with stairs & steps
22. Falls between levels

Electric shocks, fires, burns and scalds

23. Electrical hazards
24. Fire
25. Hot surfaces and materials

Collisions, cuts and strains

26. Collision and entrapment
27. Explosions
28. Position and operability of amenities etc.
29. Structural collapse and falling elements