

How Care Homes Can Make Compliance Easy

Home is where we feel safe, but it is also the place where we're most likely to die in a fire. For the older generation, the most recent government statistics are shocking.

In the 2014/15 government report, it was found that 41% of all fatalities from fires in England were 65 years old and over. This makes the elderly 10 times more likely to die in a fire than younger people.

Why are older people more at risk?

There are many factors that contribute to older people being at greater risk from fire. Many older people enjoy good mental and physical health, but as we age, our bodies and minds inevitably change. There is greater risk of developing mental illnesses, as well as other physical health conditions. These can make elderly people more vulnerable to harm from fire.

Senses

As we age, some of our senses can start to deteriorate, which can affect awareness if there's a fire. If you're hearing is affected, you may not hear the alarm. If sense of smell is impaired, smoke can go unnoticed. The same with touch, you may not notice or feel the change of heat in the air.

Mental vulnerability

In 2014, a resident in a care home who suffered with dementia tragically died after her nightdress came into contact with a naked flame. The investigation found that there had been no risk assessment which identified her smoking as a risk, despite cigarette burns having already been found on the carpet in her room. The home in Southwark faced a fine of over £170,000 for contravening regulations and most horrifically - were responsible for a loss of life that could have been prevented.

Some of the most vulnerable people can have a slower reaction time to events such as a fire. As it progresses, conditions like dementia will cause confusion and forgetfulness, leading to ovens not being turned off, or cigarettes not being put out properly. These are very real concerns, and their effects can be devastating.

Mobility

Impaired movement will hinder escape, and for someone who is bedridden, evacuation is clearly more difficult.

Common fire hazards in care homes

In general, care homes for the elderly are at greater risk of fire. This means that making sure fire safety precautions are in place is vital. In September 2015, the London Fire Brigade stated that it was dealing

with over 10 fires a week in care homes and sheltered accommodation alone. One of the main hazards they found was fire doors wedged open.

Wedging open a fire door is a serious risk to people and buildings, as it allows fire and smoke to spread.

Fire doors need taming

With this in mind, the importance of fire doors becomes clear. But they can be heavy. They cause injuries for the less able-bodied and trap people in their rooms. They can make places difficult to move around in. Fire doors can be obstructive beasts, so it's easy to see why people wedge them open.

For many, keeping fire doors open makes life easier by improving access. It also improves ventilation and reduces injuries from handling a heavy fire door. Ventilation and air quality are boosted, and the risk of injury is reduced. Fire inspectors across the UK recognise the need to hold fire doors open - with appropriate fire door retainers.

Fireco helps care homes by providing simple and trusted solutions to the problem of wedged open fire doors, with wireless devices which are easy to fit and use. They listen for the sound of a fire alarm, and close the door if there is a fire.

Summerlands Care Home saved lives

Summerlands Care Home, located in Southsea, provides care and support for 23 residents living with learning disabilities and mobility issues. They looked for a solution to help their residents with easy access while making sure they stay compliant with fire regulations.

Summerlands fitted Dorgard, a wireless device to hold open their fire doors safely. Elysia at the home said: "They're a good fit for safety and access because of our client group. Our residents spend the majority of their day in the lounge and dining room, so keeping the doors open in these areas with Dorgards makes life much easier for them."

On 10 March 2015, a fire unexpectedly broke out in the laundry room. As the home had precautions in place, the fire doors automatically closed when the alarm sounded. This left the fire and smoke contained in the laundry room, giving precious time to evacuate the residents to safety. Elysia commented: "Dorgard proved invaluable as they were on the fire doors directly near to where the fire started. Our residents didn't inhale any smoke when being evacuated, so no one was harmed."

You can't always stop a fire from happening, but you can prevent a fire from becoming catastrophic. Summerlands are a shining example, and saved their residents' lives. Elysia said: "It's great that they function properly and do what they are supposed to, close the doors in an emergency and keep our residents safe. We just have that peace of mind."

Compliance can be easy

There are now more people in the UK over the age of 60 than there are under 18. With an ever-growing aging population, fire safety for older people has never been more important.

What simple checks can you make? Making sure exits are clear, fire doors aren't wedged open, and evacuation plans and risk assessments are up to date. These help provide a safer environment, one that can save lives.

Fireco makes compliance easy with simple solutions for difficult fire safety problems; making care homes safer, more accessible and ensuring compliance is one less thing to worry about.

For more information on how Fireco can help your care home with compliance, visit www.fireco.uk.

Our thanks to Fireco for compiling this article.

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