



**private housing standards**



# **Top 5 Hazards In The Home**



## Promoting safe, healthy and well managed privately owned homes

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- Tenancy Relations
- Damp and mold

## What are the top five hazards?

A hazard is something that could be dangerous or could cause damage or accidents. The extent of the damage or accident could cause death. Some of the most dangerous hazards occur in the home usually caused because a house is not up to current standards.

Sheffield's top five hazards are:

- **Falls on stairs**
- **Excess cold**
- **Falls on level surfaces**
- **Fire**
- **Entry by intruders**

Each hazard is looked at individually in this guidance, including the typical causes of the hazard and what can be done to make the property safer.

Hazards are assessed according to their likely impact on people in a vulnerable group. Within the top four of these hazards the most vulnerable group are older people.

## What is the purpose of this guidance?

This guidance is to let people know what the biggest risks are in their properties so that they (or their landlords) can take action to reduce or remove them.

Each year housing conditions are blamed in up to 50,000 deaths and around 500,000 illnesses requiring medical attention. These statistics and many others form part of the evidence base of the system. Statistics were drawn from extensive research in the UK, in this case the Home Accident Surveillance System.

Figures quoted are for percentages of homes with serious health and safety hazards.

**FACT FILE****Hazard – Falling on Stairs****Most vulnerable:  
60 years plus****Houses affected – 2 in 5 (40%)****Summary: This hazard covers falls on stairs.****Health Effects**

Falls on stairs account for around 25% of falls in homes. Injuries from stair falls are often more serious than falls on a level surface. The nature of the injuries relate to the distance of the fall, the hardness of the surface and the frailty of the person falling. Following a fall, the health of an elderly person may deteriorate generally. After an initial fall heart problems, flu, pneumonia, and bronchitis may result even if not directly related to the original injury sustained in a fall.

**Causes**

Older housing in Sheffield is particularly at risk of this hazard, with steep staircases with narrow treads.

Disrepair to staircases including damaged handrails and broken or loose treads are easily identifiable as faults that need immediate attention.

There are also problems with the absence of handrails or inadequate handrails, particularly hazardous on steep attic stairs with winding sections.

External and cellar steps, often uneven and without handrails



are particular problems, both of which are made worse by poor lighting and the stone or concrete construction.

Falls on stairs are more likely to result in an injury when there is an obstacle or hard surface at the bottom such as a door radiator or furniture.

New double glazed door-frames are another problem with raised door-frame cills creating an extra trip hazard.

**Preventative Measures**

Stairs should all be the same height within a flight of stairs except for obvious changes in direction of stairs such as winders. All elements of stairs should be kept in good repair, including carpets.

The provision of carpet or rugs at the foot of stairs to help cushion possible impact will help. Obstacles such as furniture, radiators and glazed doors should be 1m away from the bottom step.

Openings in the guardrails and handrails of stairs and landings should be less than 100mm. Handrails should be between 0.9m and 1m measured from the top of the handrail to the pitch line of the stairs. Timbers to guardrails on landings should be vertical, not horizontal to help prevent children climbing.

There should be adequate artificial lighting to staircase including the top and foot of the flight, controlled with two-way light switching.



RoSPA (Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents) say “The largest proportion of accidents are falls from stairs or steps with over 60 per cent of deaths resulting from accidents on stairs.

Avoid leaving items on the stairs – they are a tripping hazard.

Try to avoid repetitive carpet patterns that may produce a false perception for those with poor eyesight.

Make sure banisters are sturdy. The fitting of two easy-grip handrails gives more stability”



## Hazard – Excess Cold

### Most vulnerable – 65 years plus

Houses affected - 1 in 3 (35%)

### Summary – from poor indoor temperatures

Until recently half of all houses in Sheffield posed serious hazards due to excess cold. With the Council’s provision of free loft and cavity wall insulation, taken up by over 30,000 households, this hazard has been drastically reduced. However in 2011 it still affected one third of the houses in Sheffield.

### Health Effects

The main threats to health occur when temperatures fall below the minimum satisfactory levels for relatively long periods. There are serious health risks for the elderly, including heart attacks, strokes, pneumonia and a great risk of hypothermia, especially for the elderly in temperatures below 10°C.

Heart attacks and strokes account for half of excess winter deaths, respiratory diseases (e.g. flu, pneumonia, bronchitis) account for another third. There can also be an increase in blood pressure and reduced resistance to infection because of the effect of cold air on bronchial linings and immune systems, including the worsening of symptoms of rheumatoid arthritis.

RoSPA say “The cost of providing adequate heating in winter is undoubtedly an important factor.

Wear several thin layers of clothing. Natural fibres like wool are warmer than synthetic fabrics.

Eat regular meals and take hot drinks during the day.

Move about at regular intervals.

Contact local electricity and gas boards if difficulty is experienced in meeting bills.”

### Causes and Preventative Measures

The main causes of this hazard are lack of insulation, inadequate heating, draughts and dampness.

### Insulation

There should be appropriate levels of thermal insulation to minimise heat loss. The current standard for roof insulation is 270mm. Most houses will have much less insulation than this unless improved recently. Cavity wall insulation and insulated plasterboards to houses without cavity walls can be used to increase internal temperatures.



Cellars with missing ceilings drastically affect temperatures in ground floor rooms – in this case the gaps between the joists can be insulated. Sloping ceilings of attic rooms are often not insulated – these can be improved either with solid insulation from the roof space or with insulated plasterboards in the room.

For information and possible help to provide insulation see:  
 Website: [www.sheffield.gov.uk/freeinsulation](http://www.sheffield.gov.uk/freeinsulation)  
 e-mail: [insulation@sheffield.gov.uk](mailto:insulation@sheffield.gov.uk)  
 Telephone 0800 915 9096

## Ventilation

Doors and windows should be draught free. Draughts from other sources should be investigated. There should be fans for rapid ventilation at times of high moisture production (i.e. cooking and bathing) in kitchens and bathrooms. Permanent vents such as air bricks and trickle vents on windows should be used to allow a little background ventilation to help prevent condensation.

## Heating

Appropriate controllable heating should be properly installed and maintained. Thermostatic radiator valves help control heating to individual rooms. In a shared house, bedsit or flat all occupants should have control of heating to their rooms.

## Dampness

Condensation problems can be an indicator that the provisions for heating, ventilation or insulation are inadequate. However, sometimes condensation is caused by the occupant not heating and ventilating or through excessive uncontrolled moisture production. For more advice on condensation please see our leaflet "Damp and mould in tenanted properties".

## FACT FILE

**Hazard – Falling on Level Surfaces**

**Most vulnerable – 60 years plus.**

**Houses affected – 1 in 5 (20%)**

**Summary: falls on any level surface such as floors, yards and paths.**

## Health Effects

Physical injuries such as bruising, fractures, head, brain and spinal injuries. The extent of the injury depends on distance of the fall and the kind of surface fallen. Stone, concrete, ceramic tiled floors and cellar floors are hard unforgiving surfaces whereas carpets give a softer landing meaning less or minimal injuries.

Following a fall, the health of an elderly person may deteriorate generally. After an initial fall heart problems, flu, pneumonia, and bronchitis may result even if not directly related to the original injury sustained in a fall.

## Causes

Uneven internal floors, cellar floors and external yards increase the risk of falls, particularly where there is inadequate lighting. External paths with smooth surfaces which are slippery when wet, or where ice can



form in puddles increases risks of falls. Modern double glazed door frames often have a cill that projects over the step. Cluttered interiors increase the chances of trips.

RoSPA say "15% of falls are from a chair or out of bed (on two levels) and a similar number are caused by a slip or trip on the same level, e.g. falling over a mat or a rug.

The danger of slipping and tripping created by worn rugs, slippery floors or paths, uneven surfaces, trailing flexes, and items left lying around.

Loose or badly worn footwear. Well-fitting shoes can help with balance and stability.

Spills on the floor should be cleaned up immediately to prevent slipping on them."

## Preventative Measures

External surfaces should be laid towards falls to prevent water pooling resulting in patches of ice in winter. Rainwater pipes and gutters should not leak as these also make patches of ice in winter. External lighting will allow any obstructions to be seen and switches should be positioned for ease of use. The use of movement activated external lighting should be considered. Internal layouts should be arranged to allow for adequate space to carry out day to day tasks. Replacement external doors should have shallow cills.

## FACT FILE

### Hazard - Fire

Most vulnerable:  
60 Years plus

Houses affected - 1 in 10 (10%)

**Summary:** This hazard relates to threats from uncontrolled fire and associated smoke including injuries from clothing catching alight, often occurring when people attempt to put out a fire.

### Health Effects

More than 400 people die each year as a result of accidental fires and more than 11,000 are injured. As well as burns, deaths can result from gas, smoke or carbon monoxide poisoning.

### Causes

Many incidents are preventable, with accidental causes of fire including unattended cooking, failure to switch off electrical equipment (i.e. heaters), and lack of care when smoking accounting; for the vast majority of fires.

Half of all fires are related to cooking, including chip pan fires, and the poor location of cookers.

Old electric fuse boards and wiring are a cause of fires.

The risk from fire increases with the number of storeys. Most



of Sheffield's older three storey houses were built without fire protection.

Some houses in Sheffield have staircases that descend into kitchens where fires commonly start.

### Preventative Measures

Smoke alarms should be fitted on each landing and a fire blanket provided in the kitchen.

Cookers should be sited in a safe location away from flammable items such as curtains. Heaters, ideally central heating, should be regularly serviced and maintained. There should be enough electric sockets to avoid trailing wires. Electric wiring should be properly installed, maintained and regularly tested – usually every 5 years.

Ideally there should be a direct escape route through to the outside without having to pass through danger areas, such as kitchens. Where this is not possible hazards can be reduced with a fire door and self closer, and escape windows from the first floor.

South Yorkshire Fire have a scheme to give advice to people in their own homes, called the Home Safety Check – this provides advice on how to make your home safer including the provision of free battery smoke detectors where required.

Telephone 253 2314, text FREE to 87023 or for more fire safety tips check out [www.syfire.gov.uk](http://www.syfire.gov.uk)



## 10 Top tips to help make your home safe from fire

- Fit smoke alarms and check them regularly (weekly). Preferably main operated or one with a ten year battery.
- Make a fire action plan so that everyone in your house knows how to escape in the event of fire.
- Don't use chip pans oven chips or thermostat controlled deep fat fryers are much safer.
- Never leave lit candles unattended and make sure they are put out after use.
- Never smoke in bed and make sure smoking materials are stubbed out and disposed of carefully.
- Keep matches and lighters away from children.
- Keep clothing away from heating appliances and fire guards.
- Don't leave cooking unattended (Accidents whilst cooking account for 59% of fires in the home.)
- Turn electrical appliances off after use and before bed especially heaters and cookers.
- Take special care when you are tired or when you've been drinking. (Half of all deaths in domestic fires happen between 10pm and 8am.)



## Hazard – Entry by Intruders. Most vulnerable – Everyone

### Houses affected - 1 in 12 (7.5%)

**Summary:** This hazard relates to keeping a dwelling secure against unauthorised entry and maintaining its safety.

#### Health effects

Mental harm, distress and anguish after burglary affects more than 75% of victims. The fear of being burgled tends to be heightened by knowing people who have been burgled and by publicity about crimes, particularly in areas with high incidences of burglary. Injuries occur where the victim is attacked by the burglar.

#### Causes

Poor lighting around the house, poorly constructed or unrepaired doors and windows with inadequate locks. Doors with barrel locks with internal thumb turns immediately next to glazed panels. Absence of other security measures all increase the risk of enforced entry, particularly in areas of high level of crime.



#### Preventive Measures

Make the house safe against unauthorised entry so as to delay and deter intruders and make the occupants feel safer. Fit window locks and dead locks to doors, security lights, spy

holes and chains on entrance doors. Consideration should be given to the need for external security lighting.

Note: A balance has to be made between security risks from other hazards. Locked external doors and windows may affect the means of escape in the case of fire. Security measures should not affect a quick escape in case of fire.

### Further information

Hazards are assessed using the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS). Operating guidance is issued by the Government - **see [www.communities.gov.uk/](http://www.communities.gov.uk/)** Search for “HHSRS operating guidance”. There is also a guide for landlords and property related professionals. Search the above website for “HHSRS guide for landlords and property related professionals”.

A short guide giving brief details of all 29 hazards is available at **[www.sheffield.gov.uk](http://www.sheffield.gov.uk)** Search for “HHSRS short guide”.

Hazards are split into two categories – serious hazards and hazards. The figures quoted in this booklet all relate to the serious hazards.

### Advice for Tenants

Where private tenants identify problems they should first approach their landlord to seek improvements. The Council will be able give advice and can take action where landlords fail to attend to serious hazards. For further help and advice contact:

#### Private Housing Standards

**Howden House, 1 Union Street Sheffield, S1 2SH**

**Tel: 0114 273 4680 E-mail: [phs@sheffield.gov.uk](mailto:phs@sheffield.gov.uk)**

**Website: [www.sheffield.gov.uk/phs](http://www.sheffield.gov.uk/phs)**





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