

Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and
Local Government
Rùnaire a' Chaibineit airson Ceartas Sòisealta, Taigheadas,
agus Riaghladh Ionadail
Shona Robison BPA/MSP



Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
gov.scot

T: 0300 244 4000
E: Scottish.ministers@gov.scot

Ariane Burgess MSP
Convener
Local Government, Housing and Planning
Committee
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

by email to localgov.committee@parliament.scot

16th March 2022

Dear Ariane,

Re: New standards of fire alarms in all homes in Scotland by February 2022.

Thank you for your letter of 23 February regarding the new interlinked fire alarms standard under the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 (Tolerable Standard) (Extension of Criterion) Order 2019, which came into effect from 1 February 2022.

Improving fire safety remains an important priority for both national and local government. These regulations were introduced to help save lives after the tragic Grenfell fire, ensuring that owner-occupied and social rented homes in Scotland meet exactly the same standards that have been in place for new build properties and the private rental sector for a decade. The new interlinked fire alarms standard requires that every home must have:

- one smoke alarm in the living room or the room that is most frequently used in the daytime;
- one smoke alarm in every hallway and landing; and
- one heat alarm in the kitchen

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A householder can use either sealed battery alarms, which they can fit themselves without the need for an electrician, or mains-wired alarms, which should be fitted by a qualified electrician. All smoke and heat alarms should be mounted on the ceiling and be interlinked. If there is a carbon-fuelled appliance – like a boiler, fire, heater or flue – in any room, then there must also be a carbon monoxide detector in that room, but this does **not** need to be linked to the fire alarms.

If an area is open plan, one alarm can cover the whole room provided it can be located where it is no more than 7.5 metres from any point in the room. If the space includes a kitchen area it should be a heat alarm rather than a smoke alarm.

We have regularly updated our website which provides information on a range of matters related to the new fire alarms standard - [Fire and smoke alarms: changes to the law - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](http://www.gov.scot).

In our communications we have consistently highlighted that the legislation provides flexibility for people to fit the necessary alarms in due course if they were unable to do so by the February deadline. The legal duty rests with local authorities, not homeowners, to ensure homes are fitted with the correct alarms. No one will be breaking the law and there are no penalties for non-compliance if people were not able to comply with the February 2022 deadline. However, we would encourage everyone to do so as these alarms can protect lives and property.

As local authorities are required to have a strategy for ensuring compliance with the tolerable standard within a reasonable period, they have a wide range of discretionary powers to assist home owners and, where necessary and appropriate, to require owners to carry out work to improve substandard homes. We published a statement in partnership with COSLA on 21 January [Fire alarm legislation: joint statement with COSLA - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](http://www.gov.scot) confirming that local authorities will be taking a proportionate and measured approach to compliance and that individual circumstances will be taken into account as well as the evolving situation and context of the Covid-19 pandemic.

In relation to home insurance policies, my officials have engaged with the Association of British Insurers (ABI) which has advised us, as set out on its website, [Fire ABI](http://www.abi.co.uk), that ABI member firms are aware of the changes to legislation and that insurers may ask a customer questions about whether or not the property is fitted with working fire alarms, but are not likely to ask questions about specific standards. ABI have also indicated that insurers are unlikely to invalidate a home insurance claim for existing customers who haven't yet complied with the new law in Scotland. Anyone who is unclear about the terms and conditions of their specific policy in relation to the heat and smoke alarm requirements should get in touch with their home insurer in the first instance.

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At present fire alarms requirements are not part of the Home Report and no one is prevented from selling a home if they have not installed interlinked alarms. Questions in the Home Report relating to the new standard will be considered as part of the Home Report Review consultation in due course.

My officials continue to engage with fire alarm manufacturers and I am aware that some manufacturers are still facing supply issues. This only affects those manufacturers that rely on imported components. Some manufacturers do have stock availability and specialist retailers are also able to meet demand, subject to logistical challenges; such as delivery schedules and transportation. People are understandably concerned about problems sourcing the alarms and I want to reassure them that the legislation provides flexibility for work to be completed within a reasonable period, taking into account individual circumstances.

I would like to emphasise that as a general principle people who own their homes are responsible for works to protect their property. However, the Scottish Government recognises that some may not be able to meet the cost of fitting these alarms. That is why we have provided targeted funding to Care and Repair Scotland to provide support for those with particular needs to fit the necessary compliant alarms free of charge. This assistance is for older and disabled people who own and live in council tax bands A-C, who are either of state pension age and in receipt of guaranteed Pension Credit, or have a disability and in a support group for Employment and Support Allowance. Contact details for local Care and Repair offices is available at [Office Locations | Care and Repair Scotland](#). People can also complete a website contact form [Contact | Care and Repair Scotland](#).

Care and Repair is managing the delivery of grants and the contract with its supplier across the country. As we didn't want funding to be a barrier to this important work, my officials have continued a dialogue with Care and Repair about resource requirements and we have now provided an additional £600,000 to Care and Repair from the start of last month, which has more than doubled its total funding package to £1.1 million.

As part of Care & Repair Scotland's agreement with the manufacturer, older and disabled people who would not qualify for the free alarms are able to get subsidised alarms from the manufacturer through Care and Repair's installation service.

The additional funding provided to Care and Repair last month has also allowed it to expand its service to other local authority areas which were not part of the scheme when it started in September 2021. Apart from West Lothian local authority area, all local authority areas are now covered either individually or through local agreements. Residents without a local Care and Repair service may be able to approach their local authority, which has broad discretionary powers to offer assistance, subject to available local resources and priorities.

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As well as the £1.1 million funding to Care and Repair, we have also provided another £1 million to the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) to support its Home Fire Safety Visit scheme. To protect the most vulnerable, SFRS will only fit interlinked alarms into owner-occupied homes where the individual/household is assessed as “high risk” through SFRS’s Home Fire Safety Visit assessment process. If the individual / household does not meet the criteria, SFRS staff will provide safety advice, information and details of the revised legislation during the visit. Interim detection can also be supplied if the property has no detectors at present. A Home Fire Safety Visit can be requested online or by contacting SFRS on 0800 0731999 or by texting “FIRE” to 80800.

The Scottish Government has made available information on its website and in its ongoing communication on the new interlinked fire alarms since last year, in order to provide the necessary information and assurance to homeowners. As you may know we ran a mass media campaign last autumn as well as providing information and a partner toolkit to a range of stakeholders to raise awareness of the new legislation. Our independent evaluation showed our awareness raising campaign was very successful. This included printed leaflets in every single library across Scotland.

I have written to parliamentary colleagues on a number of occasion with information on the new fire alarms standard, most recently being on 19 January 2022.

I have enclosed the partner toolkit, which provides information, material and a guide to the activity for partners to use and help spread the message, which I hope will be helpful.

Yours sincerely,

SHONA ROBISON

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