

Albion Mercer

A FREE GUIDE FROM ALBION MERCER

Fire Safety for Residential Blocks

An essential guide for managing agents, freeholders and residential management companies

Fire risk assessments, fire doors and your responsibilities explained.



Does your building need a fire risk assessment?

If you manage or own a block of flats, you will normally need a fire risk assessment (FRA), even if the building is small.

This includes purpose-built and converted buildings, properties with only two flats and some buildings without internal communal corridors or staircases.

What does an FRA cover?

The assessment considers fire risks and whether suitable precautions are in place to protect residents and others who may be affected.

Escape routes

Stairs, corridors, exits and access for residents.

Fire doors

Entrance doors, communal doors and fire separation.

Safety systems

Alarms, emergency lighting and smoke control, where present.

Fire hazards

Electrical and other potential sources of fire.

Building construction

The structure and external walls, including balconies.

Management

Maintenance records, resident information and evacuation arrangements.

What about individual flats?

A normal assessment of the common parts does not generally involve a full inspection inside every flat. Flat entrance doors, the building structure and external walls are nevertheless relevant. Where concerns are identified, more detailed investigation may be recommended.

Even a small converted building may require an FRA.

Not having a shared internal staircase does not automatically remove the requirement.

How often is a fire risk assessment needed?

There is no universal legal requirement to commission a completely new FRA every year. However, an assessment must be reviewed regularly and kept up to date.

When should it be reviewed?

- At the review interval appropriate to the building and the risks identified.
- After significant alterations or changes to the building's layout.
- Where occupation, management or fire precautions change significantly.
- Following a fire or other incident that raises concerns.
- Whenever there is reason to believe the existing assessment is no longer valid.

New assessment or review?

A new assessment establishes the risks and fire precautions needed for the building.

A review checks whether the existing assessment is still suitable, whether circumstances have changed and whether further action is required.

A review is not necessarily a shorter visit or a smaller report.

The extent of work depends on the building, its condition and the quality of the information available.

Many managing agents arrange periodic professional reviews as part of their fire safety management programme. The frequency should reflect the property rather than a blanket rule for every building.

Which type of residential FRA do you need?

The terms Type 1, Type 2, Type 3 and Type 4 describe different scopes of assessment. Most straightforward blocks begin with a Type 1 assessment.

01 TYPE 1 / Common parts, non-intrusive

Usually the starting point for a residential block. The assessor examines accessible common parts without opening up the construction.

02 TYPE 2 / Common parts, intrusive

Includes targeted investigation of concealed construction where there are concerns about fire separation or hidden defects.

03 TYPE 3 / Common parts and flats, non-intrusive

Extends the assessment into a sample of flats to consider relevant fire precautions and means of escape.

04 TYPE 4 / Common parts and flats, intrusive

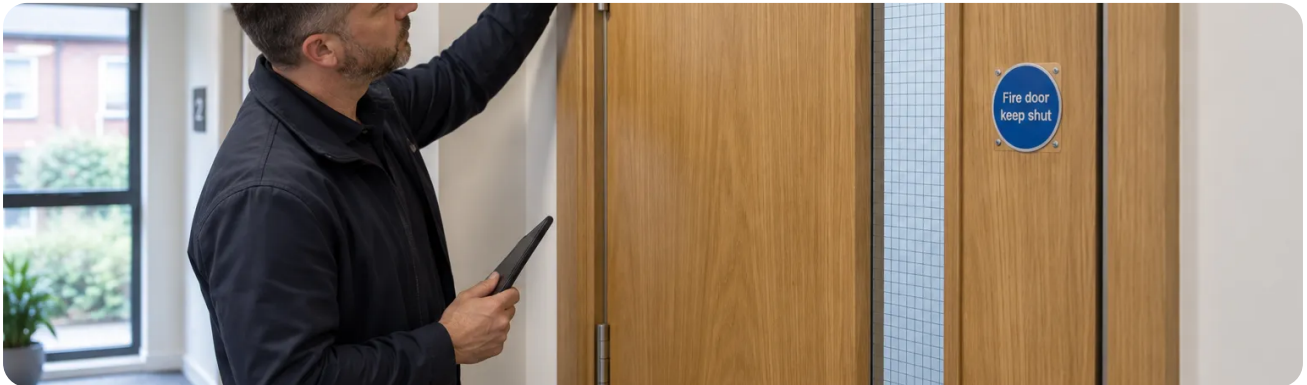
The most extensive of the four, with investigation of concealed construction in common parts and flats.

The scope should reflect the building, not just the label.

A more intrusive assessment or specialist investigation may be appropriate where construction or fire precautions give cause for concern.

Fire doors: checks and inspections

Fire doors help stop fire and smoke spreading. They need to be correctly fitted, maintained and able to close properly.



Routine checks

These are straightforward visual and functional checks for obvious defects: does the door close properly, is its closer working, and are the leaf, frame and seals visibly damaged?

Every 3 months

For buildings with a top storey above 11 metres: check communal fire doors.

At least every 12 months

In those buildings: use best endeavours to check flat entrance fire doors and record access attempts.

When is a professional inspection appropriate?

Where the FRA identifies concerns, doors are damaged or altered, or a detailed door-by-door record is needed to arrange repairs. A professional inspection examines accessible components such as leaves, frames, gaps, hinges, closers, seals and glazing.

Routine checks and professional inspections are different.

A detailed inspection does not replace regular checks or maintenance. Some concerns need further specialist investigation.

Who is responsible for fire safety?

Fire safety is not simply a matter of arranging an assessment. The fire precautions identified must be maintained and necessary work carried out.

Who is the Responsible Person?

Under fire safety legislation, responsibility generally follows control of the relevant premises or parts of the building. A freeholder, landlord, management company or managing agent may have duties, depending on the arrangements.

Appointing a managing agent does not automatically transfer every legal duty.

The contracts, management arrangements and degree of control matter. More than one person or organisation may have duties and need to cooperate.

What should be managed?

- Keep a suitable FRA in place and under review.
- Inspect, test and maintain relevant fire safety systems and equipment.
- Act on findings and keep records of completed work.
- Provide residents with the fire safety information required for their building.
- Make sure evacuation arrangements are suitable and explained.

Where an RMC or RTM appoints an agent

Directors should understand what their company remains responsible for, what the agent has agreed to manage and how recommendations and expenditure will be reported back to them.

Some taller or higher-risk buildings have additional duties, including requirements concerning evacuation planning and certain resident-specific arrangements.

What happens during a fire risk assessment?

The process is generally straightforward. We agree the scope and access arrangements in advance, carry out the assessment and provide a written report.

01 Before the visit

We confirm the building type, number of flats, areas to be assessed and access arrangements. Previous FRAs and maintenance records are helpful, but missing documents need not prevent a booking.

02 During the assessment

The assessor examines relevant accessible areas and fire precautions, considers management arrangements and reviews the evidence available. Anything that cannot be inspected or confirmed is recorded.

03 After the visit

You receive a report setting out the scope, significant findings, any deficiencies, recommended actions, priorities and appropriate timescales.

Will residents need to provide access?

Entry into individual flats is not generally needed for a normal Type 1 FRA. Access to certain doors or other areas may be required depending on the agreed scope. We will explain this beforehand.

A useful report explains what needs doing, why it matters and how urgently.

This helps managing agents advise clients, instruct contractors and track outstanding work.

What if the FRA identifies problems?

It is common for an FRA to identify items needing attention. This does not necessarily mean that a building is unsafe or that extensive works are required.

Examples of typical findings

Fire doors

A defective closer, damaged leaf or excessive gaps may need repair or replacement.

Escape routes

Stored furniture, combustible items or obstructions may need to be removed.

Fire safety systems

Failed tests, defective equipment or missing servicing records may need follow-up.

Fire separation

Unsealed service penetrations or construction concerns may need investigation.

How should managing agents respond?

Deal promptly with urgent life-safety concerns. For other findings, obtain any necessary approval, arrange the work and keep evidence such as invoices, photographs and certificates.

An FRA can support maintenance planning and help explain necessary expenditure to RMC directors, freeholders and leaseholders. Keep the recommendations under review as work progresses.

A clear action plan makes follow-up easier.

It helps distinguish urgent safety work from planned repairs, without treating every recommendation as equally serious.

Managing fire safety between assessments

An FRA is a starting point, not the end of the process. Ongoing checking, servicing and record keeping help keep the building safe between professional assessments.

01 Keep common areas safe

Look out for blocked escape routes, damaged doors, unsafe storage and changes to how communal spaces are used.

02 Maintain relevant systems

Arrange servicing, inspections and tests for fire alarms, emergency lighting, smoke control and other equipment where installed.

03 Keep fire doors under review

Carry out required routine checks, respond to damage reports and arrange professional inspections where needed.

04 Keep residents informed

Provide required fire safety instructions and explain evacuation arrangements. Resident information duties apply to all multi-occupied residential buildings.

05 Close out FRA actions

Record decisions, approvals, contractor instructions, completed works and any findings needing further assessment.

Additional duties can apply to taller or higher-risk blocks.

Check whether the building is subject to enhanced building-information, inspection or residential evacuation-planning requirements.

Preparing for your fire risk assessment

A little preparation makes the visit easier and helps the assessor understand your building. You do not need to have every document before booking.

About the building

- Address, approximate age, number of flats and whether it is purpose-built or converted.
- Any commercial premises, alterations or relevant changes since the last FRA.

Access arrangements

- Keys or codes for common areas, plant rooms and relevant service spaces.
- A site contact and details of any areas that may be inaccessible.

Useful documents

- Previous FRAs, reviews and outstanding action plans.
- EICR for the communal electrical installation, where applicable.
- Fire alarm, emergency lighting and smoke-control service or testing records, where relevant.
- Fire-door inspection records and evidence of significant repairs.
- Available fire strategy, plans and information on previous fire safety works.

Do not delay the booking because a record is missing.

Let us know what is available and flag any urgent defects or known concerns before the visit.

ABOUT ALBION MERCER

Fire safety advice for the properties you manage

Albion Mercer provides residential fire risk assessments and fire-door inspections for managing agents, freeholders and residential management companies. We work with small converted properties and larger purpose-built blocks, providing clear findings and practical recommendations.

EXPERIENCE & CREDENTIALS

Lead assessor Ian Munro-Price has more than 25 years of property-industry experience. He is listed on the National Fire Risk Assessors Register (NFRAR) and is an Associate Member of the Institute of Fire Safety Managers.

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Serving Dorset, South Somerset, Hampshire and surrounding areas

This guide provides general information for residential buildings in England and is not a substitute for a property-specific fire risk assessment. Requirements depend on the circumstances of the building. Sources include the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005, the Fire Safety Act 2021, the Fire Safety (England) Regulations 2022 and official government guidance. Guidance checked 20 October 2026.