

Covid-19 Simultaneous Evacuation & Waking Watches

This guidance has been produced in order to support employers and responsible persons (RPs) as determined in the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 that due to Covid-19 have decided to temporarily change from a stay put evacuation policy in favour of simultaneous evacuation. Due to the dynamic nature of the current situation this guidance is under constant review and is only valid while this situation continues.

Due to changes in working practices and potential reduction in staff numbers the RP may have made the decision to move from a stay put policy to that of simultaneous evacuation. Where the need for a waking watch has been identified the RP will need to ensure it has been implemented and maintained in order to ensure the viability of the premises for continued residential occupation.

Typically firefighters are called to a larger number of domestic fires during evenings and weekends, however during the current crisis there are likely to be increased numbers of people staying at home due to the ongoing lockdown arrangements, some of whom may be vulnerable or unwell. This may increase the potential for more domestic fires, the common causes of which are cooking, smoking, electrical items and heating sources. It is for this reason that it is important the people remain vigilant to the safety of themselves and others within the property.

Key points to consider as the RP,

- Where one is not already in place, RPs should consider installing a common alarm system (one that sounds throughout the property) to support the move from a stay put policy to simultaneous evacuation. Further guidance on simultaneous evacuation can be found via the following link,
https://www.nationalfirechiefs.org.uk/write/MediaUploads/NFCC%20Guidance%20publications/Protection/01052018NFCC_simultaneous_Evacuation_guidance_final_doc.pdf
- Every effort should be made to maintain the waking watch where it is required and in use.
- The National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) consider that staff providing a waking watch function should be considered key workers. Additional guidance on key working can be found via the following link,
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-educational-provision/guidance-for-schools-colleges-and-local-authorities-on-maintaining-educational-provision>
- Be proactive, premises with a waking watch should review their fire risk assessment (FRA) and be in regular contact with those carrying out the waking watch and the residents.
- RPs should consider the resilience of their waking watch arrangements and have suitable contingency plans in place should their existing arrangements fail.
- Those operating a waking watch should ensure that all personnel involved have received the government guidance on social distancing and that there are adequate facilities available to ensure social distancing and hand washing routines. Advice on social distancing and other Covid-19 related subjects can be found via the following link,

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>

Difficulties maintaining a waking watch

Where difficulties are encountered following the guidance above there may be alternatives for maintaining the provision. These should only be adopted for an interim period and must be subject to regular review.

The RP should,

- Make all effort to maintain the waking watch
- Consider contingency plans in the event of staff illness
- Consider resilience for existing arrangements, such as 3rd party contractors where necessary, alternative providers or mutual support from local partnerships.
- Advise the local fire & rescue service to any changes to the waking watch provision so that the appropriate operational response can be considered in the event of an emergency
- Consult the local fire and rescue service for further advice
- Where appropriate, consider re-locating vulnerable residents to a place of greater safety
- Provide an increased flow of information to residents in relation to any changes in the fire evacuation strategy and existing fire safety provisions
- Provide and communicate comprehensive information on the actions to be taken in the event of a fire,
- Call 999 at once and leave the building
- Be prepared to get out, have clothes, coats and shoes immediately available.

The full NFCC guidance document can be accessed via the following link,

https://www.nationalfirechiefs.org.uk/write/MediaUploads/COVID-19/Protection%20documents/COVID-19_waking_watch_V2_FINAL.pdf