APPLICATION OF SECTION 16 OF THE HOUSING ACT, 1961

Code of Practice
for means of escape in the case of fire at houses in multiple occupation
## METRIC EQUIVALENTS

Housing Act 1961, Section 16

**Code of Practice for means of escape in the case of fire at houses in multiple occupation (Publication No. 88)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Imperial Measurement Quantity Unit</th>
<th>Metric Equivalent Quantity Unit</th>
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<td>8</td>
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### General Notes

1. $\frac{3}{4}$ in
2. $1\frac{1}{8}$ in
3. 2 in
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### Notes

- 1. $\frac{3}{4}$ in
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- 5. $\frac{3}{4}$ in

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Housing Act, 1961—Section 16

CODE OF PRACTICE FOR MEANS OF ESCAPE IN THE CASE OF FIRE AT HOUSES IN MULTIPLE OCCUPATION

1. Section 16 of the Housing Act, 1961, applies to all houses or parts of houses which are let in lodgings or are occupied by members of more than one family and brings under control many buildings not hitherto affected by legislation on means of escape in case of fire. It also applies to a house which is divided into separate units (e.g., self-contained flats) where they are separately rated.

2. Fire risk is inherent in any residential occupation and in an average house a single internal staircase usually affords the only means of escape from the upper storeys to the safety of the street.

3. To ensure safe means of escape from such a house when it is in multiple occupation it is essential (a) that the occupations are separated from each other by fire-resisting construction; (b) that the staircase is properly enclosed and protected from fire and/or smoke and (c) that there is a satisfactory escape route or routes.

4. An internal staircase affords a reasonably safe route of escape provided it is enclosed with fire-resisting construction so that, in the case of fire occurring in the premises, it would remain intact and free from smoke and flame for a sufficient time to allow the occupants to leave the building. A staircase so arranged is termed 'a protected staircase' (see General Notes).

5. Exit solely to the street via a single protected staircase without lobbies should normally be accepted only in a house not exceeding three storeys in height with a total occupation of not more than 12 persons in not more than six separate occupations.

6. An alternative means of escape should be required in all other cases where practicable.

   This may be provided at the top of the building (a) by access to the roof and escape from that roof down through an adjoining building; (b) by an opening giving access to the roof of a rear or side addition contiguous with a similar addition adjoining; (c) by a gangway or balcony from window or door to a similar opening in an adjoining building.

   Escape such as (a), (b) and (c) above involves trespass on an adjoining property and could only be implemented with the consent of all interested parties, but when adjoining properties are similar in occupation and risk the advantages of such an arrangement are usually mutual and agreement between adjoining owners seldom presents difficulties.

   Failing the provision of means of escape by the means described in (a), (b) and (c) above the provision of an external iron staircase will be necessary.

7. Where the provision of alternative means of escape is impracticable the single staircase forming the only escape should be lobbyed at each floor level.

   When such lobbies form the approach to more than one occupation the partitions forming the lobby should be fire-resisting as described for a protected staircase and the doors between the lobbies and the rooms, as well as those between the lobby and the protected staircase, should be fire-resisting and self-closing.

8. In certain cases the provision of lobbies may involve an unreasonable encroachment upon the floor space in rooms resulting in the extra safety only being obtained by a lessening of the living standards. In such circumstances a downward escape only by way of a single protected staircase could be accepted for a building not exceeding four storeys in height above pavement but, to secure additional protection, doors to the staircase should be protected on both sides if they are of panelled construction or less than 1 1/2" in thickness.

9. Rescue by the Fire Brigade from the upper storeys of a higher building may be difficult and in a building over four storeys in height a fire-resisting screen and door should be provided in the staircase to separate the storeys above that height from those below and secondary means of escape should be provided from those storeys notwithstanding the degree of protection afforded to the staircase.
10. Where a basement occurs which is separately occupied and has its own external approaches which are adequate for escape from all parts of the basement, it should be separated entirely from the rest of the building (a) by sealing off the stair-well at ground floor level with fire-resisting flooring or (b) by providing fire-resisting imperforate partitions to the spandril of the staircase in the ground storey and protecting the soffit of the stairs over with plaster, plasterboard or asbestos wallboard.

11. Where a basement is separately occupied and is approached only by the common internal staircase, the basement flight of the stairs should be separated from the ground storey by a fire-resisting spandril partition and door and the soffit of the stairs over protected by plaster, plasterboard or asbestos wallboard and in addition the ground storey accommodation should be separated from the staircase by fire-resisting partitions and doors.

12. When a house is arranged in self-contained flats, or could be so arranged, exit from the upper floors to the street solely by way of a single internal staircase could be considered satisfactory up to the top floor level of a building not exceeding four storeys in height above pavement provided the following requirements are met:

(a) the staircase is adequately protected;
(b) each flat is properly separate from an adjoining flat and
(c) the entrance to each flat from the protected staircase is by a fire-resisting self-closing door into a hallway or vestibule enclosed with partitions constructed of non-combustible materials or partitions faced with materials not readily combustible, such as plasterboard.

13. Gas or electric cookers should not be permitted within the staircase enclosure.

14. The installation of additional meters should not be permitted in common staircases or escape routes unless they are contained within specially constructed compartments having a standard of fire resistance of one half-hour as recommended in paragraphs 3.01 of B.S. Code of Practice C.P. 331; Part II; 1965—Meters and Metering Control.

15. Existing gas meters in common staircases or escape routes should, unless it is impracticable to do so, be enclosed within compartments of fire-resisting materials having a standard of fire resistance of one half-hour as specified in the foregoing paragraph and such enclosures should also extend around any lead piping within staircases or escape routes.

16. The following schedule shows methods of applying the means of escape and protection described above to a range of buildings likely to be met and the general notes at the end give further information on protected staircases, secondary exits, screens and partitions, etc.

SCHEDULE

Illustrations of the types of premises described in this schedule are included at the end of this document and lettered accordingly.

A. Two storey house

In a two storey house with one occupation per storey, the risk would be very low and requirements would not be justified. When, however, the upper storey is in more than one occupation, the occupations should be separated by fire-resisting construction and the staircase enclosures and doors should have a reasonable standard of fire-resistance.

B. Two storey house with basement

(i) The protection of the ground and first floor storeys should be as in ‘A’ and the ground storey should be separated from the basement by means of fire-resisting partitions and door and the soffit of the stairs from the ground floor to the first floor should be protected by plaster, plasterboard or asbestos wallboard.

(ii) Where open basement areas adjoin the building or where the surrounding ground is substantially below the ground floor level, the house virtually becomes three storey in height above the ground with the escape route via the ground (middle) storey. In such a case, the staircase should be separated from the living accommodation on the ground floor by fire-resisting partitions and fire-resisting self-closing doors, and the basement should be cut off as in (i). (See also paragraph 10 above.)
C. Three or four storey house with or without basement with upward and downward escapes from the upper floors

In a house with three or four storeys above pavement level, with or without basement, where the provision of a secondary exit is possible, the following conditions should be met:

(i) A secondary exit to the roof and thence to the roof of an adjoining building or some other appropriate secondary exit from the upper part of the building to an adjoining building should be provided and made available at all times.

(ii) A fire-resisting screen and door between the stairs and the top floor landing, to protect the landing, should be provided if the secondary exit is from that landing. Should the secondary exit be from a room or enclosed space, the screen and door need not be provided but the door and partition to the room or enclosed space should be fire-resisting and any added protection that might be necessary should be provided on the staircase side. The door to this room should be without lock fastenings and should be marked ‘FIRE EXIT’.

(iii) The staircase enclosure and exit passage to the street should be protected and all doors therein except those in the top storey should be made fire-resisting and self-closing, the protection being on the room side.

(iv) A fire-resisting spandril partition and fire-resisting door should be provided to separate any basement stairs from the ground storey and from the upper flights of stairs. (See also paragraph 10 above.)

(v) Different occupations within a storey should be adequately separated by fire-resisting construction.

D. Three storey house with or without basement with downward escape only from the upper floors

In a house of three storeys above pavement level where a secondary exit is not possible from the upper part, a staircase protected throughout and with the proper separation of any basement storey from the ground storey may be accepted, provided the building (excluding the basement), does not contain more than 12 persons in not more than six occupations.

Where such a downward escape only is practicable, the doors to the staircase in the topmost storey should be protected on the staircase side and the ceiling of the staircase should be protected on the underside against penetration of fire from the top of the staircase into the roof space. (See also paragraph 10 above.)

E. Three or four storey house with or without basement with downward escape only from the upper floors

In houses of three storeys (other than as described in ‘D’ above) or four storeys above pavement, with or without basement, and where exit from the upper storeys is solely by way of the internal staircase and street, the following conditions should be met, together with items (iv) and (v) in ‘C’ above:

(a) The staircase and doors thereto should be protected in all storeys and the exitway to the street should be similarly treated.

(b) Where practicable, the entrance to each storey from the protected staircase, except in the topmost and basement storeys, should be through a lobby and, where the lobby is common to two or more occupations, the partitions forming such lobby and the doors therein should be fire-resisting and the doors self-closing. (See paragraphs 7 and 8 above.)

F. House of five or more storeys with or without basement

(1) In a house of five or more storeys above pavement, with or without basement, a secondary exit should be provided from the storeys above the fourth storey and a fire-resisting screen and door should be placed across the stairs at that level. The staircase and doors should be protected in all storeys and the requirements in paragraphs (i), (iv) and (v) of ‘C’ foregoing should be met.

(2) Where a secondary exit, either by roof escape, etc., or by external staircase cannot be provided, lobby access on all floors other than the top floor and basement may be accepted to give a protected downward escape.

G.

Where a house is arranged in self-contained flats or could be adapted to provide self-contained flats, the foregoing standard should be applied, and also the following:

(a) each flat should have its own entrance by means of a fire-resisting self-closing door from a protected staircase;
(b) each flat should have its own entrance vestibule with its various rooms entered from that vestibule and the partitions separating those rooms from the entrance vestibule should be of non-combustible materials or be faced with materials not readily combustible, such as plasterboard. Ordinary glass borrowed lights in panels kept shut may be permitted in these partitions but any borrowed lights in the common staircase should be glazed with fire-resisting glass.

GENERAL NOTES

(1) Protected staircases

The partitions comprising the staircase and enclosure should be of non-combustible materials not less than three inches thick or a timber stud partition plastered on both sides. Existing wood panel partitions may be retained if the panels are made up solid flush with the framing with plasterboard or asbestos wallboard on the side remote from the stairs and thereafter the whole partition completely sheeted on that side with similar materials. Matchboard partitions, if retained, should be sheeted on both sides with plasterboard or asbestos wallboard. New partitions may be of timber studding not less than 2” × 2” faced on both sides with plasterboard or asbestos wallboard. Any glazing in such an enclosure should be of fire-resisting quality in fixed panels not exceeding four square feet in area. All ordinary glazing in existing partitions enclosing the staircase or escape routes should be replaced with fire-resisting glazing in frames, fixed shut.

Doors in the enclosures of a protected staircase should be of solid wood of 1 3/4” finished thickness or doors constructed to conform with B.S.459 (half-hour type). Existing panelled wood doors 1 3/4” in thickness in the stiles and rails may be retained if protected in the panels with plasterboard or 1/8” asbestos wallboard. If of lesser thickness in the stiles and rails, the panels should be made up solid flush with the framing and thereafter the whole door completely faced with similar materials. Any ordinary glazing in such doors or borrowed lights above the doors should be replaced with glazing of fire-resisting quality in panels fixed shut. All doors should be made effectively self-closing by means of rising-butt hinges with machined bearing surfaces or by spring mechanisms.

The soffit of a protected staircase, together with the underside of the exitway to the street, should be of sound lath and plaster and where not so constructed should be protected with plasterboard or asbestos wallboard not less than 1/2” in thickness.

Cupboards within a protected staircase should be enclosed with partitions and doors of the construction and standard described above and where under the stairs the soffit of the stairs within the cupboard should be similarly protected. The doors should be self-closing and/or kept shut when not in use and marked to that effect.

Any necessary protection to enclosures and doors should be provided on the side remote from the staircase, except in the topmost storey where, when the enclosures and doors are exposed to the risk of fire from below, the protection is best provided on the staircase side.

Protection to a staircase by the provision of lobbies should be sought where this is practicable and where this additional protection seems necessary (e.g., to rooms at the rear inaccessible to Fire Brigade rescue appliances and also in buildings covered by "E" above).

(2) Protected staircases with lobbies forming approach to more than one occupation

Partitions comprising the staircase enclosure, all doors in the enclosure, the soffit of the staircase and the exitway to the street, together with the protection and arrangement of cupboards within the staircase enclosure, should be all as described above for protected staircases. Where lobbies will be common to two or more occupations, they should be enclosed by partitions of studding not less than 2” × 2”, faced on both sides with plasterboard or should be otherwise constructed as described for protected staircases and should either be carried up the full height of the storey or ceiled over with similar materials. All doors to these lobbies should be fire-resisting and self-closing. It is important to ensure that all lobbies are properly protected from the fire risk below by lath and plaster ceiling, plasterboard or asbestos wallboard.

(3) Different occupations within a storey

Partitions separating occupations from each other and from passages, lobbies and escape routes and any doors therein, should be constructed all as described above for protected staircases and the doors should be self-closing.
(4) Secondary exits

Secondary exits may be—(1) by trapdoor or skylight easily opened or suitably counter-balanced to open easily without the use of a key; (2) by dormer door or window or opening sash fitted only with barrel bolts or lever fastenings.

Ladders should be of light but rigid construction with flat treads and should preferably be fixed permanently at an approximate angle of 60°; where hinged they should be arranged to lower easily to the floor by means of a rope and pulley.

Walkways on the roof should be by means of fixed steps, duckboards or ladders with flat treads, safeguarded by guardrails of gas barrel, so arranged to afford safe and easy access to a safe position on or in an adjoining building.

Doors between a staircase and rooms or spaces from which a secondary exit is provided, should, except where the risk from below is separated by a fire-resisting door and screen across the staircase landing, be 1 1/2" solid wood or doors protected on the staircase side as described above for protected staircases. A door to a room or space affording a secondary exit should be fitted with such simple fastenings as can be operated without the use of a key or, alternatively, the door should be fitted with a night latch on the inside with a panel of thin glazing approximately 9" x 9" formed in the door near the latch and marked on its outside face 'BREAK GLASS TO OPERATE FASTENING' in 1/8" letters.

(5) Protective screens and partitions to top storey landing (see 'C' (ii) above) or across staircases to storeys above the fourth storey level (see 'F' above)

Such screens or partitions should be constructed of 2" x 2" studs faced both sides with plasterboard or asbestos wallboard either carried up to full height of the storey or so otherwise arranged as to provide complete fire-resisting separation to the storey or storeys concerned. Any glazing should be fixed and of fire-resisting quality. Doors in the screens or partitions should be as described above for protected staircases with any making-up or protection that may be necessary carried out on the side of the downward flight of stairs and should be marked on that side 'TO FIRE EXIT' in 1/8" letters; the doors to be free of fastenings except a ball catch or provided with a night latch and glass panel as described in (4) above for secondary exits.

(6) Separation of basements

Partitions separating basement stairs from the ground storey, and the door therein, should be constructed all as described in (5) above, but with the protection on the basement side. The door should be fitted only with such fastenings as can be opened without the use of a key and rendered self-closing, all as previously described. External exits from basements and area steps should be properly maintained at all times. (See also paragraph 10 above.)

(7) Residential accommodation over a shop

If, in a building comprising a shop on the ground floor, with residential accommodation above, the residential accommodation is sublet to more than one tenant, then the residential accommodation may be deemed to come within the provisions of Section 16 of the Housing Act, 1961.

In such a case, the residential portion of the building should be treated as described above and should, in addition, be separated from the shop by partitions, doors and soffits similar to those described for protected staircases.

The exit from the residential accommodation should, wherever possible, be by means of an enclosed passageway through the shop to the street and the enclosures and soffits of such a passageway should be adequately protected against the shop risk and particularly from basement storage.

Where such a passageway is not possible, an alternative means of escape should be provided from the residential portion of the building and the stairs should be adequately separated from the shop. An alternative exit from the stairs can sometimes be made across a flat roof over the rear of the shop to an adjoining flat roof, but where this is accepted the flat roof and any roof lights therein should have a good standard of fire-resistance.
A  TWO STOREY HOUSE

DIFERENT OCCUPATIONS WITHIN A STOREY TO BE SEPARATED

STAIRCASE ENCLOSURE TO HAVE A REASONABLE STANDARD OF FIRE RESISTANCE

B  TWO STOREY HOUSE WITH BASEMENT

DIFFERENT OCCUPATIONS WITHIN A STOREY TO BE SEPARATED

PROTECTED STAIRCASE AND FIRE-RESISTING SELF-CLOSING DOORS IN THE GROUND STOREY.

BASEMENT TO BE SEPARATED BY FIRE-RESISTING CONSTRUCTION, (PARTITION AND DOORS AND PROTECTION TO SOFFIT OF STAIRCASE) (SEE ALSO PARA 10 ON PAGE 2)
C THREE OR FOUR STOREY HOUSE WITH OR WITHOUT BASEMENT WITH UPWARD & DOWNWARD ESCAPES FROM THE UPPER FLOORS

SECONDARY EXIT

FIRE RESISTING PARTITION AND DOOR TO SEPARATE TOP FLOOR EXIT

LADDER TO ROOF

PROTECTED STAIRCASE AND FIRE-RESISTING SELF-CLOSING DOORS

DIFFERENT OCCUPATIONS FROM THE UPPER FLOORS

EXIT TO STREET

BASEMENT TO BE SEPARATED BY FIRE-RESISTING CONSTRUCTION (PARTITION AND DOOR PROTECTED SOFFIT ETC.)

[SEE ALSO PARA 10 ON PAGE 2]

D THREE STOREY HOUSE WITH OR WITHOUT BASEMENT AND WITH DOWNWARD ESCAPE ONLY FROM THE UPPER FLOORS, AND WHERE TOTAL OCCUPATION DOES NOT EXCEED TWELVE PERSONS IN NOT MORE THAN SIX SEPARATE LETTINGS OR OCCUPATIONS

ANY NECESSARY PROTECTION ON STAIRS SIDE (TOP STOREY ONLY)

PROTECTED STAIRCASE AND FIRE-RESISTING SELF-CLOSING DOORS THROUGHOUT

DIFFERENT OCCUPATIONS WITHIN A STOREY TO BE SEPARATED

BASEMENT TO BE SEPARATED BY FIRE-RESISTING CONSTRUCTION (PARTITION AND DOOR PROTECTED SOFFIT ETC.)

[SEE ALSO PARA 10 ON PAGE 2]
E

THREE OR FOUR STOREY HOUSE WITH OR WITHOUT BASEMENT WITH DOWNWARD ESCAPE ONLY FROM THE UPPER FLOORS

PARTITIONS FORMING LOBBIES COMMON TO TWO OR MORE OCCUPATIONS TO BE FIRE-RESISTING AND THE DOORS THEREIN TO BE FIRE-RESISTING AND SELF-CLOSING WHERE THE PROVISION OF LOBBIES IS IMPrACTICABLE OWING TO REDUCTION IN FLOOR SPACE, ETC. [SEE PARA B ON PAGE 2] THE DOORS TO THE STAIRCASE SHOULD BE PROTECTED ON BOTH SIDES.

F(I)

HOUSE OF FIVE OR MORE STOREYS WITH OR WITHOUT BASEMENT

SECONDARY EXIT

LADDER TO ROOF OR ALTERNATIVE ESCAPE BY BALCONY EXTERNAL STAIRCASE ETC.

FIRE RESISTING SCREEN AND DOOR TO SEPARATE ANY STOREYS ABOVE THE FOURTH STOREY FROM THOSE STOREYS BELOW.

DIFFERENT OCCUPATIONS WITHIN A STOREY TO BE SEPARATED

PROTECTED STAIRCASE AND FIRE RESISTING SELF-CLOSING DOORS

BASEMENT TO BE SEPARATED BY FIRE RESISTING CONSTRUCTION (PARTITION AND DOOR, PROTECTED SOFFIT ETC.) [SEE ALSO PARA 10 ON PAGE 2]
F(2) House of five or more storeys with or without basement — downward escape only where alternative escape from upper storeys is impracticable

Protected staircase and fire-resisting self-closing doors

Different occupations within a storey to be separated

Lobbies

Exit to street

Basement to be separated by fire-resisting construction (partition and doors protected soffit etc.)

[See also para 10 on page 2]