**Advice Note on Code of Practice for Fire Safety in New and Existing Community Dwelling Houses**

**Introduction**

The Code of Practice for Fire Safety in New and Existing Community Dwelling Houses has been completed. Signature by the Minister for Housing Planning, Community and Local Government is expected very shortly. The Code of Practice is to be read in conjunction with the Revised TGD Part B, Volume 2, Dwelling Houses, which came into force on 1st July 2017.

The following is a brief outline of the Code of Practice:

**Background**

The National Housing Strategy for People with Disability 2011-2016 aims to support people with disabilities to live as independently as possible and to replace congregated settings within the community. In recent times organisations providing community dwellings had difficulty using existing housing stock because under Parts B and M of the Building Regulations their use was classified as ‘Residential Institutional’ and as such they were required to meet the same standards which applied to much larger buildings such as nursing homes. There is a gulf between the standards required for ‘dwellings’ and ‘residential institutional’ buildings. These standards proved to be too onerous for economical and practical use of existing housing stock and for new community dwellings. The need has been acknowledged for another classification of residential building which is now been introduced as *Residential (Dwellings) Purpose Group 1(d) – Community Dwelling House* in both the revised TGD Part B and the Code of Practice for Fire safety in Community Dwelling Houses.

**Contents of the Code of Practice**

The Code of Practice recognises the importance of management in the operation of community houses. In addition to setting out fire safety measures required for all new and existing buildings used as community dwelling houses, the Code of Practice also sets out the requirements for an effective fire safety management policy appropriate to community dwelling house accommodation. The Code of Practice has been divided into two sections:

1. **Management of Fire Safety**
   - Includes guidance for organisations providing and running community dwellings

2. **Fire Safety Measures**
   - Includes guidance on the physical measures which are to be read in conjunction with TGD Part B, Volume 2, Dwelling Houses.

There are appendices attached which are intended for use by management:

- **A** – Risk Assessment Methodology
- **B** – Fire Action Register
- **C** – Fire Safety Register
Types of Dwelling House Covered

The code of practice will apply to new and existing buildings. The types of dwelling house covered by this Code of Practice will be:

1. Single storey community dwelling house
2. Two storey community dwelling house [ground and first floor]
3. Three storey community dwelling house [ground, first and second]

Buildings with basements are not included under this Code of Practice.

Building Users and Occupancy Level

Community dwelling houses will normally be used by:

- Children
- People with mental health issues
- People with intellectual disability
- People with physical disability

A maximum of 8 bedrooms may be accommodated within a dwelling house with an upper limit of six residents. There is no limit on the number of resident carers during the day, provided the maximum upper limit of eight people sleeping in the building is not exceeded. For example, there could be four residents and four resident carers at night.

There is no limit set out on the floor area of a community house. However, it will be limited by providing no more than eight bedrooms and by following the guidance set out in the Code of Practice and TGD B Volume 2 Dwelling Houses.

It is a mandatory requirement that residents, who will reside within these Community Dwelling Houses, must be assessed by appropriate healthcare professionals to determine their potential for supported independent living and have been selected as being capable of living in domestic scale residences.

High Dependency

The Code of Practice, Page 6, states: “NOTE: High dependency living, for example where bed evacuation or specific evacuation aids are required, is not covered by this code of practice.”

The Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government are of the view that someone in a wheelchair is not considered to be of high dependence whereas someone in a bed is.

This could prove to be problematic for some organisations caring for people with disabilities. For example, it would be safer and more expedient to wheel someone in a bed directly through an external bedroom door rather than transferring them to a wheelchair in the first instance. This might be dealt with in a risk assessment by competent professionals but strictly speaking the Department have ruled that bed evacuation is not considered to be suitable in community dwellings and that where necessary the people involved should be catered for in a residential institutional building.
Building Control Amended Regulations

- As a community dwelling house will be classified as a type of dwelling, a Fire Safety Certificate or Disability Access Certificate will not be required.

- They will be required to comply with the Fire Services Acts 1981 & 2003. This will allow Fire Authorities to inspect community dwelling houses, if they wish.

- Opt-out provisions from the BCAR system are available for community dwelling houses.

Management of Fire Safety

Management are to prepare a Fire Safety Program for each premises. This should include:

- A risk assessment of the building and the proposed residents
- Prevention of outbreaks of fire
- Training of staff in emergency procedures and evacuation drills
- Training of residents
- Inspection & maintenance of equipment
- Maintenance of building, fittings and escape routes
- Liaison with fire authority
- Keeping a fire safety register

Fire Safety Register

Weekly/Annual CHECK LISTS required for:

- Fire Detection and Alarm System
  - Staff to check weekly
  - Annual inspection & certification by competent person
- Emergency Lighting:
  - Staff to check weekly
  - Annual inspection & certification by competent person
- Portable Fire Extinguishers:
  - Staff to check weekly
  - Annual inspection & certification by competent person
- Fire Doors:
  - Check they are operating correctly and activate release mechanisms
  - Staff to be made aware of designated fire doors
- Housekeeping:
  - Escape routes / final exits /rubbish /external escape routes all to be kept clear
Guidance on the Principal Fire Safety Measures

Guidance is included on the principal fire safety measures under the same headings as TGD Part B, i.e.:

1. Means of Escape in Case of Fire:
   - Horizontal Escape Routes
   - Vertical Escape Routes
   - General Provisions for Means of Escape

2. Internal Fire Spread (Linings)

3. Internal Fire Spread (Structure)

4. External Fire Spread


Means of Escape in case of fire

- **30 minute fire protection:**
  Horizontal and vertical escape routes (staircases and corridors) should be provided with 30 minute fire resisting construction and E20/FD20 door sets. In existing buildings, if assessed by a competent professional, a “modified half hour” fire resisting construction for walls/ceilings and door sets equivalent to E20/FD20 are acceptable.

- **Fire resisting construction to be carried to full storey height**

- **Open plan not acceptable** – must have enclosed protected escape route

- **New build:** to comply with Section 1 of TGD B – Vol. 2 Dwelling Houses.

- **Existing buildings** should be provided with a level of protection at least equivalent to that specified in Section 1 of TGD B – Vol. 2.

- **Travel distance = Max. 10m** within individual bedrooms.

- **Single Staircase:** These dwellings would normally be served by a single staircase. Where more than one escape route is required a second route may be by an internal or external escape stairs

- **Access hatches in fire rated ceilings** should be E30Sa/FD30S fire rated.

Corridors

- **Fire resistance** to extend vertically into attics.
- **Alternatively** provide 30 minute fire resisting ceiling throughout the dwelling.
Fire Doors

The minimum fire resistance for a fire door set stated in the TGD B and the Code is E20/FD20. However, most providers of community houses have been installing a higher standard of door sets (FD30S). This would be better practice.

All fire resisting door sets should be fitted approved self-closing devices capable of closing the door against any latches fitted to the door with the exception of the following:

- fire doors to service ducts or cupboards which are normally kept locked shut
- doors to toilets, bathrooms and shower rooms

Door sets to common rooms and bedrooms may have free swing type closers where a self-closing device would impede day to day circulation within the premises.

In existing buildings, where the existing frame/door has been assessed by a competent person and is found to meet the equivalent standard of a E20/FD20, the fire resisting frame/door need not be replaced.

All hardware associated with these door sets must be compatible with a 30 minute fire resisting door assembly.

Doors on Escape Routes

- **Final exit doors** should only be fitted with a lock or fastening which is readily operated, without a key, from the side approached by people making their escape.

- Where a **secure door** is operated by a code, combination, swipe or proximity card, biometric data, or similar means, it should also be capable of being overridden from the side approached by people making their escape.

- **Electrically powered locks** should return to the unlocked position when any of the following occur:
  
  (a) on operation of the fire alarm, or

  (b) on loss of power or system error, or

  (c) on activation of a manual door release unit (Type A) conforming to IS EN 54-11:2001+A1:2006 positioned at the door on the side approached by people making their escape.
Windows / Rooflights

Openable section = unobstructed clear open area of at least 0.33m²

Height = not less than 450 mm clear.

Width = not less than 450 mm clear.

Bottom of the window opening =
not more than 1100mm above FFL.

Bottom of a rooflight = not less than 600 mm above FFL.

If security risk of readily openable windows is envisaged by a risk assessment an audible alarm may be provided to detect if a window has been opened without authority.

Thermoplastic material should not be used in windows, rooflights or lighting diffusers in protected escape stairs.

It is not mandatory to replace windows in existing community dwellings unless they are being replaced as part of regular maintenance. However, windows should be changed if the building is the subject of a change of use.

Inner rooms

Bedrooms should not be inner rooms.

Signage

As community dwelling houses are small in scale and the desire is to create a domestic feeling rather than an institutional one:

- “Fire Door Keep Shit” signage on fire doors not required.
- Exit signs (green men) only required if escape route is not apparent.
- Signs are required for location of fire-fighting equipment.

Emergency Lighting

A self-contained emergency luminaire should be provided to corridors, hallways, landings and stairways.

Fire Detection and Alarm

The fire detection and alarm system should be designed to comply with the requirements for a Category LD1 life safety system, as defined in I.S. 3218:2013 and should thus be designed to provide automatic detection throughout the premises. However, an LD1 system will not work with free swing closers, in which case an L1 system should be used.
First Aid Fire Fighting Equipment

Strategic positioning of portable extinguishing equipment throughout a community dwelling house enhances the fire protection of the building by enabling an attack to be made on a developing fire in its early stages by suitably trained staff.

Portable Fire Extinguishers

Portable fire extinguishers should be provided.

Fire Blankets

At least one light duty fire blanket should be fitted in the kitchen.

Internal Fire Spread (Linings)

The surface of the walls and ceilings should comply with the classifications indicated below for the different locations:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Circulation Spaces</td>
<td>Class 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toilets/ Bathrooms</td>
<td>Class 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All other rooms</td>
<td>Class 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Parts of the wall linings within any room may be a class lower than that specified in Table 3 (but not lower than Class 3), provided the total area of those parts in any room does not exceed one half of the floor area, subject to a **maximum area of 20m²** and the **area of any one part should not exceed 5m²** and should be separated from any other such part by a distance of **not less than 2m**.

Internal Fire Spread (Structure)

- **Walls** (including any glazing) enclosing the entrance hallway, stairway and corridors should be constructed having a minimum of 30 minutes fire resistance incorporating E20/FD20 fire doors.

- **Floors** should achieve a minimum of 30 minutes fire resistance, with the exception of an existing two storey dwelling, where modified half hour fire resistance rating is acceptable.

- **Cupboards and storage presses** opening onto a protected enclosure should be fitted with an E20/FD20 fire door.

- **Unenclosed hanging coats / wet weather equipment** allowed in entrance hall.

- **Semi-detached or terraced houses** should have a complete vertical separating wall having a minimum fire resistance of 60 minutes

- All services that pass through fire resisting construction or fire barriers should be appropriately protected.
External Fire Spread

- Table 4 in the Code of Practice shows the permitted unprotected areas in a small Dwelling.
- For larger dwellings, exceeding 24m. in length, refer Table 4.2 in TGD B, Vol. 2.
- Limitations on roof coverings are shown in Tables 4.3 and 4.4 Table 4.2 in TGD B, Vol. 2.

Access and Facilities for the Fire Service

- Refer to Section 5 of TGD B – Fire Safety - Vol 2 Dwelling houses

- **Existing community dwelling houses**: access for the fire service should be assessed by a suitably qualified and competent person.

- **Fire brigade appliances** should be able to get within **45 m** of the principal entrance to the dwelling house.

- **Turning facilities** for appliances should be provided in any dead-end access **route that is > 20 m long** i.e. Table 5.1 TGD B Vol 2.

- Min. width of road between kerbs **3.7m**
- Min. width between gates **3.1m**
- Min. turning circle for fire appliance **16.8m**
- Min. clearance height **3.7m**
- Min. carrying capacity **12.5 tonnes**

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