

# Passive fire safety



If there was a fire in your property, or one that you occupy, you'd want measures in place to slow or stop its spread.

Slowing or stopping the spread of fire can be achieved by dividing the building using fire-resisting walls, floors, ceilings and doors – often referred to as 'compartmentation'.

This can minimise property damage and business disruption while also saving lives. It can also help employers and property owners meet their legal obligations to provide and maintain safe premises for people to use.

Existing Building Regulations pay particular attention to fire safety standards in new buildings. But, alterations made later on, like unprotected openings for wiring between rooms can have a negative effect, allowing fire and/or smoke to spread more quickly.

### Key actions when implementing passive fire protection

- Establish what fire resistance needs to be maintained in your building for the purpose of Building Regulations and other applicable legislation, certificates or licences.
  - A key example of this is escape routes. Part of your fire risk assessment should establish how long the fire resistance measures need to hold for to let people evacuate safely.
- Appoint a competent person or firm to inspect your building for unprotected openings in fire-resisting elements of construction. Have them prepare a detailed report of their findings and keep this safe alongside your fire risk assessment.
  - Note: Some openings may be necessary. For example, vents in shafts that contain gas pipes. If it's not clear whether or not an opening should be protected, seek expert advice. Some types of vent grille are designed to close in the event of a fire and these are not always obvious.
- Get necessary permissions before starting any remedial work, or changing the premises that may affect fire safety, including consents because of existing licences, certificates, building preservation orders or other regulatory and legislative controls. If the building is listed, check with the local authority the work proposed is acceptable before it commences.

- Get whoever is doing the remedial work to explain what method they'll be using to achieve the required fire resistance (integrity and insulation) for each defect. Ideally, you should be using a person or firm who is certified by an independent body, for example, a company approved under the [Loss Prevention Certification Board \(LPCB\) LPS 1531 scheme](#). They should be able to confirm that:
  - the work will be done in accordance with Building Regulations;
  - the products and materials they'll use will have the minimum necessary fire resistance and are suitable for the application and environment involved (it is not uncommon for some fire-stopping products to be misused); and
  - the work has been properly completed and certificated.
- For any planned future changes to the premises involving making holes in fire resisting walls, floors, ceilings etc., make sure the person or contractor gives you a detailed method statement indicating how the fire resistance will be preserved.
- Try to avoid temporary unprotected openings during building work. Discuss with the architect how these can be kept to a minimum and what temporary suitable fire resistant barriers can be in place in the meantime.
- Check your fire risk assessment to ensure internal fire and smoke-resisting doors were considered.
  - Where the risk assessment indicates new or more fire resisting doors are needed, make sure the work is carried out by a competent person or firm – for example, a UKAS-accredited installer, with products certified by schemes operated by the LPCB and the British Woodworking Federation (BWF), the latter in conjunction with FIRAS.
  - Wherever possible, pre-assembled, tested and certified complete doorsets should be used.
- If you've got no option than trying to improve existing ordinary timber doors (because replacement isn't possible), seek specialist advice before proceeding.
- Don't allow alterations of existing fire-resisting doors (for example, openings for new glazing, door viewers, post slots) to be made without reviewing the fire risk assessment alongside the work proposed. Changing a fire door needs to be assessed by someone knowledgeable to avoid reducing or contradicting the fire resistance of the door.
- Make sure all fire-resisting doors are included in the planned preventative maintenance programme for the building and their condition is checked on a regular basis. This includes ensuring any fire alarm-connected automatic door release or door closing devices operate properly when the alarm is tested.
  - If any defects are found, get them repaired as a matter of urgency.
- Inform employees, residents and contractors during induction that wedging open fire-resisting doors is prohibited and put up signs to remind them.
- Check that fire-resisting doors are kept closed and safely secured on a regular basis.