
F5 Procedure for opening doors in a fire situation

Every residential care home has an automatic fire detection and warning system installed. The automatic fire detection provides coverage for practically every area of the building and will provide an early warning of a fire. The majority of care homes will also have an 'addressable' fire alarm system that will indicate the exact location of the fire detector that has been activated.

The fire detection in service user's bedrooms, corridors, stairwells, etc. (means of escape) will be smoke sensitive and will, in the majority of cases, react rapidly to the presence of even small amounts of smoke. The fire alarm will therefore alert staff to the presence of a fire in its very early stages, before the fire has had the opportunity to develop significantly. This will provide the opportunity for staff to investigate the cause of a fire alarm activation whilst the risk to exposure from the effects of fire is limited. It will be necessary to open doors to rooms and this must be done in a safe manner to minimise the risk posed to staff and residents.

The following procedure should be adopted:

On hearing the fire alarm staff will respond by going to the main fire alarm control panel. The person managing the fire evacuation will confirm the location of the incident from the fire alarm panel display.

Staff will go to the area indicated on the panel and begin to evacuate residents into an adjacent unaffected compartment.

It is expected that the doors to all rooms will be closed when the investigation takes place as they will either have closed automatically in response to the fire alarm or will be closed as a matter of routine. Staff will therefore be required to carefully open doors to each service user's room, including the room where the detector has been activated. This should be done in the following manner.

- From a crouched position touch the door handle and door surface with the back of the hand to determine if there is any excessive heat – this will indicate if a fire is burning within the room.
- If the door and handle are cool to the touch, the door should be opened very slightly, keeping a firm grip on the handle.
- Check for the presence of smoke paying particular attention to the upper parts of the room.
- If there is no obvious sign of fire or smoke, the door should be opened slowly to further confirm that it is safe to enter.

Under no circumstances should a door be opened if smoke is visible around the edges of the door.