

ELECTRICAL FIRE SAFETY



February 2017

OVERVIEW

Electrical Safety First is a campaigning consumer charity dedicated to preventing deaths, injuries and damage caused by electricity. We work with tenants, landlords, homeowners and the government to reduce deaths and accidents in the home.

One of our key safety campaigns is to protect tenants in privately rented homes. In England, whilst it is necessary for landlords to ensure electrical installations are kept in safe working order, there is currently no legal requirement for landlords to ensure that electrical installations are regularly checked and no evidence is required to demonstrate to tenants that the electrics are safe at the commencement of, or throughout, a tenancy. We called throughout the Housing and Planning Bill going through Parliament in 2016 for mandatory five-yearly electrical safety checks.

Electrical Safety First tasked Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service to look at issues with fires caused by electricity in the South East region of England, in order to provide further evidence to support the need for mandatory checks.

RESEARCH OUTCOME

For the purpose of this report, the South East region includes the following 10 fire services: Hampshire, Surrey, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, West Sussex, East Sussex, London, Kent, Oxfordshire and Isle of Wight. The incident data used in this report is from a 24 month period (April 2014 – March 2016).

The following summarises the findings from the data analysis.

There are currently 12,674,173 properties in the South East region. 63% of these properties are owned and the remaining 37% are rented.

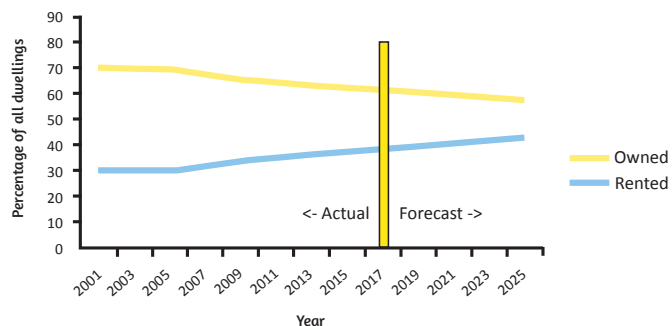
Using the trends from the last 12 years to predict the percentage of owned and rented properties in 2025, there would be a decrease in the number of properties that are owned by 2025 (from 63% to 57%) and an increase in the number of rented properties (from 37% to 43%).

This graph (Fig 1) shows the actual change since 2001 in the percentage of each tenure in the South East region (to the left of the vertical line), and the predicted forecast change up until 2025 (to the right of the vertical line).

Over the two year period there was a total of 4,692 electrical fires in the South East region. 3,053 (65%) occurred in properties that were owned and 1,639 (35%) occurred in rented properties.

There were 3.8 electrical fires per 10,000 properties that were owned, and 3.5 electrical fires per 10,000 dwellings that were rented during the two year period.

Change in Tenure (Actual and Forecast) for the South East Region



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🔦 If the number of electrical fires per 10,000 properties remains constant, there will be a **projected increase** from 1,639 electrical fires in the current two year period in rented properties to 1,921 electrical fires in a two year period in 2025. This is a **17% increase in the total number of electrical fires in rented properties from now until 2025**, due to the predicted increase in the total number of rented properties.

🔦 If the number of electrical fires per 10,000 properties remains constant, there will be a **projected decrease** from 3,053 electrical fires in the current two year period in owner occupied properties to 2,728 electrical fires in a two year period in 2025. **This is an 11% decrease in the total number of electrical fires in owner occupied properties from now until 2025**, due to the predicted decrease in the total number of owner occupied properties.

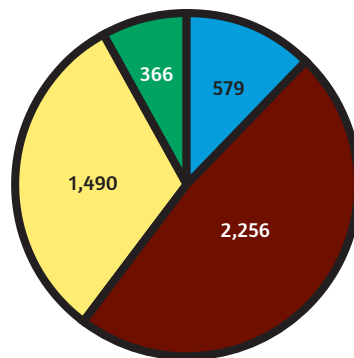
🔦 The Isle of Wight, West Sussex and Buckinghamshire had the highest proportion of electrical fires per 10,000 properties with 8.9, 8.9 and 6.5 respectively. Berkshire, Surrey and London experienced the fewest electrical fires per 10,000 properties with 2.6, 2.7 and 3.0 respectively.

🔦 The main cause of all electrical fires in the South East region is a fault in electrical equipment or appliances. 48% of all the electrical fires in the region were caused by this. **The second highest cause of electrical fires in the South East region is a faulty fuel (electricity) supply. 32% of all electrical fires in the region were caused by this. (Fig 2)**

🔦 Using Hampshire data as a sample of the South East region, there were **474 electrical fires over the two year period. In the same 24 months there were only 75 gas related fires**, which is 16% of the total number of electrical fires.

🔦 Based on trends over the last 12 years, there is likely to be a 17% increase in the number of electrical fires in the rented sector by 2025. This is due to the projected increase in the number of rented properties there will be by 2025. The sample data from Hampshire shows that there are far fewer gas related fires than electrical based incidents in the rented sector. The most common cause of electrical fires in the region is a fault in the equipment or appliance, with the second highest cause being a faulty fuel supply. **In summary, with the number of rented properties set to increase over the next eight years, the rented sector will continue to be at risk of fires which are electrical based.**

Types of Electrical Fires in the South East Region



- Fault in equipment
- Faulty fuel supply
- Faulty leads
- Negligent use

CONCLUSIONS

- 🗨️ Electrical Safety First has long called for the introduction of mandatory five-yearly electrical safety checks in the private rented sector. Our position has been a shared one amongst the stakeholder community, and in line with what has been introduced in Scotland and those now being pursued in Wales. **The research by Hampshire Fire Service shows an increasing problem with fires caused by electricity in the private rented sector and a future projection in the South East region predicts the issue will only get worse, not improve.**
- 🗨️ Gas checks in the private rented sector work and have had a long term effect by bringing down fires and incidents caused by gas in the privately rented homes. **Fires caused by electricity remain at unacceptably higher levels. With a higher number of people entering the private rented sector, we would strongly argue the need to provide regular electrical safety checks for all tenants throughout England.**
- 🗨️ Government policyⁱⁱ is now indicating that more of the population will need to live in the private rented sector in the future and the Government is now aiming to provide security and protect tenants. **Mandatory electrical safety checks for tenants should go hand in hand with this announcement, ensuring that people living in the privately rented homes are as safe as possible with the electrical infrastructure in their rented homes.**

i <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2014-12-08/217711>

ii <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-38873524>



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