

1. Key Messages

- **Electrical Safety First has long campaigned for the introduction of five-yearly electrical safety checks in the private rented sector. We support Baroness Grender's Bill in seeking to amend the Housing and Planning Act to deliver this.**
- Electrical Safety First believe that people in the PRS would be best protected by mandatory checks on electrical installations and supplied appliances in rented homes **every five years**. We are seeking that all tenants across the UK are protected, as is already the case in Scotland. The Welsh Government is expected to bring forward regulations by 2017 and the Northern Irish Government has commenced a consultation.
- **Electrical Safety First is a charity committed to reducing deaths and accidents caused by electricity.** Electricity causes more than 20,000 house fires a year – almost half of all accidental house fires. **Every year, around 350,000 people are injured through contact with electricity and 70 people are killed in the UK, this is in comparison with carbon monoxide poisoning, gas leaks, fires and explosions that are responsible for 18 deaths in the past year, and more than 300 injuries.**ⁱ
- **Privately rented homes and homes built before 1919 are more likely to have a higher risk of fire.** In 2013, one million homes were assessed as having a higher risk of fire and a third of these are in the PRS.ⁱⁱ We believe that electrical safety checks will help reduce these risks.
- A third (35%) of private renters have been in their home for less than a year and 80% in their current home for less than five years.ⁱⁱⁱ **With such a high turnover in the PRS, and with the average tenancy now lasting for around three years, checks on electrical installations are essential; we believe this should be every 5 years.**
- **Our proposals to improve electrical standards in the PRS are not burdensome on landlords nor are they costly.** These proposals are not only about the safety of tenants but also protects a landlord's asset, with electrical checks helping to spot electrical problems before they pose a serious risk to a tenant through electrocution and to the property by reducing the risk of electrical fires.
- A recent survey found that not only was there strong support for the checks to be introduced in the PRS but that **58% of tenants already thought that rental properties were required to have such checks every year** as is the case with gas.^{iv}
- Our campaign for mandatory electrical safety checks is supported by several high profile organisations including the **Association of Residential Letting Agents (ARLA), Shelter, Crisis, Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA), London Fire Brigade and British Gas.**

2. Electrical Safety in the Home

- Deaths in Great Britain caused by **electrical fires are, on average, 56 per year**, with 18 deaths caused by an electrical distribution fault in the home. Within this subset the biggest single cause of death **is faulty cabling.**^v

- London Fire Brigade figures indicate that in 2013-14 there were 253 fires in London where the Consumer Unit was the source of ignition – **this equates to around 5 fires every week in London alone.**^{vi}
- Electrical safety in the PRS is being left behind other important safety areas, such as gas, carbon monoxide and smoke alarms. **We believe that there should be greater parity between each of these, particularly given that electricity causes half of the fires in domestic properties.**
- Poor electrical safety is a particular concern for our older population - nearly two thirds of properties occupied by couples over 60 do not meet basic electrical safety standards.^{vii} Although accidental fire deaths in the home in 2013/14 were at an historic low, over half of fatalities were aged 65 or over.^{viii}
- The Local Government Association has publicly supported the need for mandatory electrical safety checks in the PRS in order to reduce the risk of electrical fires in the home.^{ix} Electrical Safety First very much welcomes the positive contribution of local government to this important issue.

3. Protection for tenants by the provision of electrical safety checks

- A third (35%) of private renters have been in their home for less than a year and 80% in their current home for less than five years.^x **With such a high turnover in the PRS, and with the average tenancy now lasting for around three years, checks on electrical installations are essential; we believe this should be every 5 years.**
- The majority of homes (59%) in the PRS were built before 1965 with a third (32%) built before 1919. People that lived in private rented accommodation (2%) and in social housing (2%) were more likely to have had a fire than owner occupiers (1%).^{xi}
- Private rented homes and homes built before 1919 were more likely to have a higher risk of fire. In 2013, one million homes were assessed as having a higher risk of fire.^{xii} We believe that electrical safety checks, given DCLG's own statistics on electrical fires and electrical distribution faults in the home, will help reduce these risks.
- **Of the homes with a higher risk of fire, just under half (46%) were built before 1919, and one in three (29%) were in the PRS.**^{xiii} Therefore, a third of people are at serious risk of fire caused by electrical problems, which cause half of all fires in domestic homes.

4. Situation with PRS Electrical Fires in London – A regional snapshot

- Data from London Fire Brigade shows that of the fires investigated by the authority, there has been no reduction in PRS fires since 2010. Of those fires investigated, **there were 748 that proved an electrical source of ignition in the London PRS in the last 5 years, but only 97 fire investigations that proved a gas source of ignition.**^{xiv} **If the government is serious in ensuring a safer PRS, then this issue must be tackled and these figures reduced.**
- Whilst these are statistics that focus on London, we believe that investigative data from throughout the country would show similar trends on electrical fires in the PRS, particularly in other fire authority areas. There is evidence that annual gas checks work in the PRS and we suggest the government takes action with mandatory checks to

capture electrical faults before they become dangerous and cause electrical source fires.

- It should be noted that **this data relates to fires investigated by the fire investigation team only – and therefore does not represent all PRS fires caused by an electrical source. Therefore, if all fires were recorded by fire authorities or held centrally by the Department for Communities and Local Government we believe that these figures would be considerably higher.**
- Whilst fires in domestic properties have fallen in recent years, London Fire Brigade's statistics show no reduction in electrical fires in PRS properties, whereas gas figures either remain low or have reduced over the period.

5. Benefits for landlords

- Our proposals to improve housing standards are not burdensome on landlords or costly. This is not only about the safety of tenants but also the protection of property, i.e. a landlord's assets. Regular electrical checks would help to identify electrical faults and problems before they pose serious risk to a person or property.
- The costs of a mandatory 5 year electrical safety check are substantially lower than the current legal requirement for an annual gas check. Electrical Safety First believes that 5 yearly electrical safety checks would cost in the region of £150 every five years, or the equivalent of £2.50 a month – these costs are subject to regional pricing variation.
- In comparison an annual gas check costs around £70 per year, or a minimum of £350 over five years – electrical checks are far more cost effective for landlords and therefore we would argue are not burdensome.
- Recent government policy has sought to improve fire safety in domestic properties, reducing the incidence of fire and associated injuries and deaths. The Government's fire safety campaign, Fire Kills, which is run in partnership with local fire and rescue authorities and Electrical Safety First, is used to convey important fire safety and behavioural messages to households.
- We believe that more information should be provided to landlords and whilst Electrical Safety First publishes guidance for landlords on how to reduce electrical safety risks in their properties and to protect their tenants^{xv}, more needs to be done by the government to reduce electrical fires in the PRS.

ⁱ <http://www.gassafecharity.org.uk/about-us/we-are-gas-safe-charity.aspx>

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

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid

^{iv} Ipsos Mori polling, May 2016

^v <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/fire-statistics-great-britain-2013-to-2014#history>

^{vi} <http://www.london->

^{vii} http://www.fire.gov.uk/news/AC1B4F18D05A4D82B52979C6465BBFE5_2006201420_londonerswarnedofpotentialfirehazardlurkingunderthestairs.asp#VpiHqLaL_Tcs

^{viii} <http://www.electricalsafetyfirst.org.uk/mediafile/100304187/A-Shock-to-the-System.pdf>

^{ix} http://www.local.gov.uk/documents/10180/6869714/L14-797+100+Days+Fire_WEB.pdf/280f6b10-03b3-4ee7-a3e2-ae759eabb9aa

^x <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-housing-survey-2013-to-2014-headline-report>

^{xi} Ibid

^{xii} Ibid

^{xiii} Ibid

^{xiv} London Fire Brigade Data on Electrical and Gas Fire Investigation 2010-2015

^{xv} <http://www.electricalsafetyfirst.org.uk/guides-and-advice/for-landlords/>