

Snapshot Briefing on Electrical Safety in Rented Homes

Derived from Electrical Safety First's report:

Recharge: Renewing Electrical Safety for Northern Ireland's Homes.

Overview

- **Electrical Safety First is the UK charity committed to reducing the number of deaths, injuries and accidents caused by electricity. In Northern Ireland, these account for nearly 60% of all accidental house fires each year¹.**
- **This briefing provides a summary of electrical safety in the rented sectors in Northern Ireland.** It is based on Electrical Safety First's new '[Recharge](#)' report which provides a wider review of electrical safety in Northern Ireland's dwellings and recommendations to help reduce house fires and electrical risks. Independent research suggests that there would be nearly **£9million worth of savings to society annually if electrical hazards in Northern Ireland's housing stock were mitigated².**
- **We found that tenants in Northern Ireland are not being afforded the same protections from electrical risks as their counterparts in England and Scotland, where five-yearly electrical safety checks are required by law in the Private Rented Sector (PRS).**
- Tenants in Northern Ireland deserve the same protections. **The Executive should now legislate for mandatory five-yearly electrical safety checks and introduce these for all rented housing in Northern Ireland, be it social or private to protect all renters.**

The Private Rented Sector

- **The PRS is now the second largest housing tenure in Northern Ireland** – accounting for around 17% of total housing³. This emphasises the increasing importance of ensuring that those living in the sector are safe in their homes. Disrepair is higher in the PRS (53%) when compared with owner-occupied homes (45%)⁴.
- Current legislation relating to electrical safety in the PRS includes the Consumer Protection (NI) Order 1987, The Electrical Equipment (Safety) Regulations 2016 and The Plugs and Sockets (Safety) Regulations 1994. However, **none of these require regular electrical safety checks**

¹ <https://www.electricalsafetyfirst.org.uk/what-we-do/our-policies/northern-ireland/statistics-northern-ireland/>

² <https://www.nihe.gov.uk/Documents/Research/HCS-2016-Main-Reports/HCS-2016-Infographic-Summary.aspx>

³ <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/consultations/review-role-and-regulation-private-rented-sector>

⁴ <https://www.nihe.gov.uk/Documents/Research/HCS-2016-Main-Reports/HCS-Main-Report-2016.aspx>

of the electrical wiring in properties. These checks identify issues with the electrical system to help mitigate potential fire and electrical shock risks.

- Compared with the rest of the UK, **there is currently limited protection for private tenants in Northern Ireland.** Since December 2015, the Scottish Government has required PRS properties to have mandatory five-yearly electrical checks and a similar requirement was introduced in England in June 2020, with Wales expected to follow.
- Moreover, in Northern Ireland, while PRS landlords must undertake an annual gas safety check, there is no equivalent requirement for electrical checks despite **electricity causing more fires and casualties than gas each year. Indeed, electricity accounts for the majority (58%) of all accidental house fires in Northern Ireland.**
- **There is strong support for mandating electrical safety checks.** Following various reviews and consultations⁵ the **Department for Communities (DfC) proposed introducing legislation requiring private landlords to carry out five-yearly electrical safety checks. This proposal was unanimously supported by respondents, including landlord groups.**
- Electrical Safety First has campaigned for a **uniform level of protection for private tenants throughout the UK.** We are calling on the DfC to now introduce legislation for five yearly electrical inspections. These proposals would also **bring regulations in line with laws for Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs)** in Northern Ireland, where landlords are already required to carry out five-yearly checks.
- Whilst the cost of these proposals would fall on the landlord, we do not believe they would be financially onerous. The average cost of an electrical safety inspection is £150-£200. Over a five-year period, **this equates to as little as £30 a year – and protects tenants and property.**

Social Housing

- Social housing in Northern Ireland is provided by the NIHE (the Housing Executive) and 23 registered housing associations (HAs). The latter are the main developers of new social housing for rent. In 2016, it was estimated that there were 121,000 social rented homes⁶.

⁵ <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/topics/housing/private-rented-sector>

⁶ <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/topics/housing/registered-housing-associations>



- **There are no specific legal requirements for regular electrical safety checks in social housing.** As best practice the Housing Executive undertakes five-yearly electrical checks on their properties, and when there is a turnover of tenant. The practice differs between HAs, and this means that residents across the SRS are being afforded different levels of protection.
- **Additionally, there is a requirement for five-yearly electrical safety checks in the Social Rented Sector (SRS) in Scotland.** As such, there is a precedent of devolved administrations taking proactive steps to protect residents in the SRS.
- We believe all renters, regardless of tenure, should be protected with the same electrical safety standards and **recommend five-yearly electrical safety checks be required across the full social housing sector.** This would also ensure all social landlords are operating on a level playing field.

Recommendations

- **The DfC should establish a mandatory requirement for private landlords to undertake electrical safety inspections on a five-yearly basis and these should also be required by law in social housing to ensure all renters are protected from electrical risks.**
- **The Housing Fitness Standard should be updated to enhance electrical safety across all housing tenures.** We recommend the DfC adopts the Healthy Home Rating System (HHRS) model, which examines a property for various safety hazards, including electrical faults.
- **Measures to ensure that tenants in the PRS are legally protected in reporting electrical hazards to landlords,** without fear of eviction or rent rises, must also be reviewed by the DfC.
- **The DfC should amend the Landlord Registration Regulations to include a ‘fitness for habitation declaration’ at the point of registration.**

To view and download our full ‘Recharge’ report, visit our website [here](#). To discuss this work further, please contact Wayne Mackay, Public Affairs Manager, Northern Ireland and Scotland, at: wayne.mackay@electricalsafetyfirst.org.uk or on 07565614410.

