

New Fire Safety Regulations for Furnished Holiday Lets

2nd February 2016

It has come to my attention, purely by chance, that new regulations have recently been introduced which cover self-catering holiday lets. I understand that the regulations are already in place and that holiday property owners have until the end of 2016 in which to comply with them.

These regulations seem to have been a fairly closely guarded secret and many holiday property owners appear to be completely unaware of them, as indeed was I until I happened to telephone Iain "Jeck" MacKenzie, our local electrician, on another matter. Iain himself had discovered details of the regulations by chance as a result of having been contacted by one of his customers who wanted him to bring the electrics in his cottage up to date. The gist of what Iain told me was as follows:-

- All smoke alarms have a working life of 10 years at the end of which they are regarded as at "end of life" and need replacing. This is a compulsory requirement for holiday homes – and obviously advisory for one's own home.
- It is now a requirement that smoke alarms in holiday lets should be hard-wired, not simply battery operated. This has been a requirement of building regulations for all new builds for several years but now applies to all holiday properties without exception.
- The battery back-up in hard-wired alarms now needs to be of the lithium type. These batteries are available in the same 9-volt format as ordinary smoke alarm batteries. They're more expensive (£9.99 each on the Maplins' website, for example) but they do last for 10 years, so they're cheaper in the long run. "Ordinary" batteries in smoke alarms are supposed to be replaced every 12 months.
- Smoke alarms in kitchen areas must incorporate a heat detector.
- All the smoke alarms in a property must now be inter-linked so that they all sound if just one of them is triggered. That should make holiday guests think twice about burning the toast! The inter-linking can either be hard-wired or wireless. The latter is obviously easier.
- There should be a carbon monoxide detector in rooms where there are fuel-burning devices. These can be battery operated. Hard-wired ones are available but are much more expensive.
- Holiday properties must now have a modern consumer unit with the appropriate trips rather than the old-fashioned type of fuse box. This must make sense anyway as we hardly want holiday guests trying to repair a blown fuse.
- Although not a requirement of the regulations, I did find in one official online document a recommendation that there should be some form of emergency lighting in holiday properties to enable swift and easy escape from the building in the event of a fire causing a power failure. Once again, this makes sense anyway, especially in this part of the world where power outages are not unknown, as it's unwise to allow holiday guests to play around with matches and candles.
- Finally, **very important**: each holiday property must have an up-to-date Electrical Certificate. This is **not** the same as PAT testing which is merely a check on individual electrical appliances. The Electrical Certificate is issued by a fully qualified electrician and confirms that the whole electrical installation in the building complies with current standards. The certificate is valid for 5 years at the end of which another must be obtained.

I hope this is helpful. The foregoing is based on my understanding of the information given to me verbally by Iain, so I cannot guarantee that it's 100% accurate. My best advice is that you should contact a professionally qualified electrician and/or fire safety officer as soon as possible. I believe there are some quite hefty penalties for failing to comply with the new regulations so this is obviously a matter of quite some importance.