TESTING OF PANEL CONTROLLED FIRE ALARM SYSTEMS

Higher risk HMOs usually have panel controlled fire alarm systems installed. These systems are addressable and include fixed batteries that are on constant trickle charge from the mains and so are guaranteed to operate in the event of a mains failure, which is common when fire breaks out. The detectors can be smoke or heat, depending on location. There will be break glass call points on the system as well, so the alarm can be set off manually as well as automatically.

It is essential that the fire alarm and emergency lighting systems are maintained and tested. In order to be able to say with any certainty that the fire alarm is operational, weekly and six monthly test and checks must be done and be recorded in a log book. The six monthly checks must be done by a "competent person" trained to do so. Many local fire alarm specialists carry out this work.

The following is a summary of the testing recommendations in British Standard 5839 2002 Clause 45:

Weekly test

The fire alarm system should be tested weekly by a competent person (this could be the landlord, manager or a person who has been
properly instructed :

- Check the panel, check power and any signs of faults.

- With the controls enabled, test a detector or a break glass call point. The Fire Officer recommends this method which incorporates an element of weekly testing of the system and testing of the detector heads as set out in clause 45.

- If this is done, over a 6 month period, all the detectors will be covered, but regard must be had to ensuring detectors are not contaminated by the use of spray smoke. Special spray smoke/test smoke equipment can be obtained from specialist firms. Heat detector test equipment can also be obtained. Heat detectors will be sited in kitchens and boiler rooms. Ensure the system sounds, then silence, reset and log the test results.

- Record the results of the tests in a log book, these can be obtained from the fire alarm manufacturer or installer or contact the Council for a copy of a suitable log. Keep the log book in a safe place so inspecting officers can check the test results. Any incidents, false alarms or faults should also be logged.

Monthly

- Monthly, test that the system operates in the event of a mains failure, by disconnecting the alarm from the mains, you should have a switch/fused

point to do this, close to the panel. The emergency lighting should be tested in this way too.

Six monthly tests

Further details can be found in BS5839 Part 1 2002 (Clause 45).

Every 3 months, the batteries should be examined and the connections checked, electrolyte levels topped up if necessary.

Every six months (maximum limit) the system should be inspected and serviced. Deviation from this recommendation means that the system does not comply with the British Standard. The inspection and servicing to be carried out by a specialist fire alarm servicing company (look for UKAS certification). This service/inspection will include the following:

- Log book check
- Visual inspection of whole system
- Check escape routes/partitions/obstructions/building alterations

- Disconnect standby battery and simulate full load test

- Control panel check

- Detector head check

- Circuits check

- Ancillary functions check

At the completion of the service/inspection – defects to be reported and a **servicing certificate should be issued**. This certificate to be kept with records and produced for inspection by the Fire Safety Officer and/or Environmental Health Officer.

A receipt for the works is not the same as a certificate of servicing