



Circular number	38-2005	Date issued	23 August 2005
This circular is	For circulation	No response required	
This circular is	Relevant to the National Framework		
Status	This Circular amends sections 1.3 and 1.4 of Circular 46-2004		

Home Fire Risk Check Initiative: additional information

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Addressed to:

The Chair of the Fire and Rescue Authority
The Chief Executive of the County Council
The Clerk to the Fire and Rescue Authority
The Clerk to the Combined Fire and Rescue Authority
The Commissioner of the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority
The Chief Fire Officer

Please forward to:

Directors of Social Services
Directors of Housing

Summary

This Circular amends sections 1.3 and 1.4 of Circular 46-2004 ('Home Fire Risk Check Initiative').

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Fire and Rescue Service Circular 46-2004 gave guidance on delivering a programme of Home Fire Risk Checks (HFRCs), combined with the installation of free 10-year battery-operated smoke alarms and automatic fire suppression systems (AFSSs), by English fire and rescue services. We are sorry that it contained two errors, which this Circular now corrects.

2.0 AFSS installation

- 2.1 Paragraph 1.3 of Circular 46-2004 refers to the installation of AFSSs. It states that authorities would be expected to arrange for installation under contract by an accredited and experienced commercial installer. The ODPM now understands that at present, AFSSs do not have accreditation and this statement has caused some confusion among fire and rescue authorities wishing to undertake such installations.
- 2.2 Please note that this guidance should now read “authorities would be expected to arrange for installation under contract by an approved and experienced commercial installer.”
- 2.3 The Fire Industry Confederation will be able to assist fire and rescue services in identifying suitable providers for AFSSs and their installation.

3.0 Audit

- 3.1 Paragraph 1.4 of Circular 46-2004 refers to the District Auditor (appointed auditor) giving approval for expenditure to be treated as capital in the context of buying and installing 10-year battery-operated smoke alarms and AFSSs, if the District Auditor agrees that these may be capitalised. The Audit Commission has since made it clear that it is inappropriate for fire and rescue authorities to seek such approval from their appointed auditor.
- 3.2 Following discussions with ODPM, the Audit Commission has come to a consensus with appointed auditors on the accounting treatment for smoke alarms. The agreed way forward is that expenditure on smoke alarms is unlikely to be material to the authority, and the capital cost of the devices themselves can be paid out of capital grant, although in effect this would be written off to revenue in the year of purchase.
- 3.3 10-year battery-operated smoke alarms are long-life in nature and can be seen as a fundamental improvement to a property: Building Regulations have required smoke alarms to be installed in all new properties since 1992. It is true that they are not, generally, enhancements to the authority’s own property, but Regulation 25(1)(e) of the Local Authorities (Capital Finance and Accounting) (England) Regulations 2003 was introduced to cover such circumstances.
- 3.4 Auditors may still wish to review the costs that fire and rescue authorities are proposing to meet from capital grants, as elements that are clear revenue expenditure, such as hire of vans to install smoke alarms, cannot be met from HFRC funds.

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