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FINALLY – NATIONAL GUIDANCE ON FIRE SAFETY IN BLOCKS OF FLATS

A new guide to fire safety in purpose built blocks of flats has just been published which the Association of Residential Managing Agents (ARMA) hopes will bring some consistency to fire risk assessments in such buildings and help keep residents safe.

Minimising fire risks to residents in blocks of flats is all about prevention and protection: preventing fires from happening and protecting residents if they do. This is why an effective fire risk assessment of the communal areas is essential. Knowing how one should be carried out, who is competent to do it and what are the requirements that must be followed up on can often be confusing however so ARMA welcomes the publication of the first, and much needed, national guidance on fire safety for purpose built blocks of flats.

By law, fire risk assessments must be carried out and a fire policy established in the communal areas of blocks of flats; two approaches that could reduce fires and help save lives. The responsibility for these duties falls on the party with ultimate control of the management of the building. Typically this might be the freeholder, landlord, Residents Management Company or Right To Manage Company.

Confusion often arises over what is actually needed as part of a fire risk assessment, its precise scope and how frequently one should be carried out. This has led to widely varying outcomes with excessive action being taken in some blocks of flats and in others none at all, potentially endangering lives. Clear and consistent guidance is crucial therefore to ensure effective delivery of fire safety in these types of properties. The new guidance document published by the Local Government Group and sponsored by the Communities Department

and the Electrical Safety Council is intended to assist responsible persons to comply with the relevant legislation and provide some definitive standards of fire safety.

"The importance of this new guidance cannot be overestimated," comments Peter Dening, chairman of ARMA. "ARMA have pushed long and hard for some national guidance on fire safety in purpose-built blocks of flats and we hope this new document will finally provide specific and practical advice to those responsible for carrying out fire risk assessments. As an indication of the significance and demand for this guidance in the leasehold sector, ARMA recently devised a dedicated training course in anticipation of its publication - it sold out within days".

Launched this week, the 192 page document titled 'Fire Safety In Purpose Built Blocks of Flats' covers guidance on a range of topics including 'stay put' policies, alarm systems, requirements of a fire risk assessment and the law relating to fire safety in these buildings. The document also includes relevant case studies that focus on some of the common issues found in blocks of flats with suggested fire safety solutions. The guide is free to download from www.arma.org.uk.

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NOTES TO EDITORS:

1. Formed in 1991, ARMA is the only body in England and Wales to focus exclusively on matters relating to the management of long leasehold residential property. The association has over 260 firms in membership that between them manage some 900,000 units in more than 34,000 blocks of flats or estates (at least 60% of which are lessee-controlled properties). ARMA's founding principal aims are to represent its members and the interests of lessees, resident management companies and investor freeholders. More information on the association can be found at www.arma.org.uk.
2. The Local Government Group booklet 'Fire Safety In Purpose Built Blocks of Flats' is also free to download from www.local.gov.uk/fire-safety-guidance
3. ARMA was invited to be one of eight organisations that formed the project group to oversee the development of this Guidance.

4. Press release in Word form available on request.

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