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Deputy Prime Minis
Creating sustainable communities

Reducing the risks

The Housing Health and Safety Rating System



What is HHSRS?

The Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) is a new risk assessment tool used to assess potential risks to the health and safety of occupants in residential properties in England and Wales. The legislation came into effect in England on 6 April 2006 and will come into effect in Wales later in 2006.

HHSRS replaces the Housing Fitness Standard, which was set out in the Housing Act 1985.

Why is it needed?

The new assessment method focuses on the hazards that are most likely to be present in housing. Tackling these hazards will make more homes healthier and safer to live in. The Fitness Standard does not deal with, or deals inadequately with, cold and falls for example.

Who does it affect?

All owners and landlords, including social landlords.

The private sector contains some of the worst housing conditions and owners and landlords should be aware that any future inspections of their property will be made using HHSRS.

Private landlords and managing agents are advised to assess their property to determine whether there are serious hazards that may cause a health or safety risk to tenants. They should then carry out improvements to reduce the risks.

Public sector landlords also need to incorporate HHSRS into their stock condition surveys. To be decent, homes should be free of category 1 hazards. This does not mean that social landlords have to reassess their stock before 6 April. Landlords should incorporate HHSRS into their next planned stock condition survey and deal with category 1 hazards during planned refurbishment.

Tenants should be aware of the new approach taken by local authorities to deal with bad housing conditions. They still have discretion over the action they take but they are more likely to prioritise cases where there is some evidence of serious hazards.

How does it work?

A risk assessment looks at the likelihood of an incident arising from the condition of the property and the likely harmful outcome. For example, how likely is a fire to break out, what will happen if one does?

The assessment will show the presence of any serious (category 1) hazards and other less serious (category 2) hazards.

To make an assessment, local authority inspectors will make reference to the HHSRS "Operating Guidance". During an inspection they may take notes manually or may use a programme on a hand held computer.

How is it enforced and what are the penalties?

If a local authority discovers serious category 1 hazards in a home, it has a duty to take the most appropriate action.

Local authorities are advised to try to deal with problems informally at first. But if this is unsuccessful, they could require a landlord to carry out improvements to the property. For example by installing central heating and insulation to deal with cold, fix a rail to steep stairs to deal with the risk of falls, or mend a leaking roof. Local authorities also have powers to prohibit the use of the whole or part of a dwelling or restrict the number of permitted occupants. Where hazards are modest they may serve a hazard awareness notice to draw attention to a problem. Where an occupier is at immediate risk, the authority can take emergency remedial action.

A property owner who feels that an assessment is wrong can discuss matters with the inspector and ultimately will be able to challenge an enforcement decision through the Residential Property Tribunal.

Failure to comply with a statutory notice could lead to a fine of up to £5,000.

More information

www.odpm.gov.uk/hhsrs - the statutory guidance is posted on-line

ODPM has issued guidance on HHSRS for landlords and other property related professionals.

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