

Home Safety Guide





Introduction

This home safety guide is designed to help you live safely in your Black Country Housing Group property. As a landlord, we have a duty to provide a safe home. We carry out a number of inspections and checks to achieve this, for example if you are a tenant we carry out an annual gas safety inspection and an electrical inspection every 5 years. If you live in a block, we carry out a fire risk assessment. The greatest risks to health and safety in our homes are often caused by ourselves often unintentionally. As a customer of Black Country Housing Group, whether you are a tenant or a leaseholder you have a duty to co-operate with us and together we can achieve the best possible standard of health and safety.

The obligation on our customers includes allowing our staff and contractors access to carry out inspections, checks and servicing. It also means not disabling any installations or equipment provided.

This guide does not replace your lease or tenancy agreement and hopefully you will find it useful in living safely with us. If you have any concerns, comments or feedback please contact your Customer Relations Manager. Alternatively you could also email: compliance@bchg.co.uk.



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Fire safety

As your landlord, we provide and fit smoke detectors in our properties. You should also help to keep yourself safe and not do anything which could put yourself or other people at risk of injury from fire.

What can I do to stay safe?

Check that you have at least one working smoke alarm in your home. Contact us on 0300 555 0302 if you do not have a smoke alarm and we will arrange to have one installed. We recommend that you have a smoke detector in your lounge and hallway and fit a heat detector in your kitchen too. Test your smoke and heat alarm once a month. If your alarm starts to bleep on a regular basis it may have developed a fault or simply need new batteries. Please contact us for further information.

Never disconnect or take the batteries out of your smoke alarm. Some smoke alarms are connected to your electricity supply and you could be injured if you try to disconnect it. For independent fire safety advice on smoke detectors, contact

West Midlands Fire service
Free safe and well check:
wmfs.net
0800 389 5525



To reduce the risk of fire starting and spreading in your home

- Do not store gas or petrol/diesel in your property
- Do not leave candles burning or food cooking unattended
- Always close doors at night, especially the doors to the lounge and kitchen
- Keep your exit route clear and your keys in an accessible place
- Do not smoke in bed and always dispose of cigarette ends carefully
- Keep lighters and matches out of the sight and reach of children
- Don't leave vaping devices charging unattended
- Turn off all electrical items not designed to stay on for long periods
- Always use the correct type of plug on your appliances and don't overload plug sockets or extension leads
- Take extra care if you smoke when you're tired, taking prescription drugs or if you have been drinking
- Do not keep any gas cylinders in your home or communal areas. To do so is a breach of your tenancy agreement. See page 13 if you are a medical oxygen user

If there is a fire or smoke in your home, or if the smoke alarm sounds:

- Alert everyone else and leave your home, staying together where possible
- Leave by your nearest exit
- Call 999 and ask for the fire service. Keep calm and speak clearly giving as much information as you can
- Go to a place of safety, away from the building and stay there until the fire service arrive so they know you are safe

If you can't get out by your escape route:

- Get everyone into one room, preferably with a window that opens. Open the window and call for help
- Put cushions, towels or bedding at the bottom of the door to block smoke
- Call 999 and ask for the fire service. Keep calm and speak clearly giving as much information as you can
- If smoke is affecting the room you are in get as low as you can where the air will be safer to breathe



Fire safety in communal buildings

Our buildings are designed to keep you safe. If you live in a communal building, for example a block or sheltered scheme, it is important for the safety of everyone that corridors and stairwells are kept free of personal items. Mobility scooters must not be stored or left charging in corridors and escape routes. For more information on mobility scooters, please see page 12.

Fire doors

- Do not prop fire doors open in your property or in the communal areas. A fire door provides protection to the room or corridor behind, so it is important that they are kept closed unless they are fitted with an approved hold-open device. You should never wedge fire doors open.
- You should never carry out any alterations to your flat front door as this may reduce the protection it gives (the fire rating).
- Do not remove or disable door closing

devices. We have installed self-closing devices to all flat front doors and fire doors. These are a requirement of fire safety regulations. If the door closer is not working or you feel it needs to be adjusted, please contact us on 0300 555 0302 to arrange an inspection and repair.

What should I do if there is a fire?

Follow advice on the noticeboard (fire policy for your block or building).

If you have to leave the building always use the staircase and never use the lift. If you have to move through smoke keep as close to the floor as you can, where the air is fresher.

If you discover a fire in the communal areas or the alarm sounds when you are in the communal area:

- Leave the building by the nearest exit and press the break glass at the exit if fitted
- Call 999 and ask for the Fire Service - keep calm and speak clearly giving as much information as you can
- Go to the assembly point and stay there until the Fire Service arrive so they know you are safe

If you are unable to find the fire policy, please contact your Customer Relations Manager.



If there is a fire or smoke in your flat or the smoke alarm sounds:

- Alert everyone else and leave the flat, staying together where possible
- Leave the building by the nearest exit and press the break glass at the exit if fitted
- Call 999 and ask for the Fire Service - keep calm and speak clearly giving as much information as you can
- Go to the assembly point and stay there until the Fire Service arrive so they know you are safe

If you can't get out by your escape route:

- Get everyone into one room, preferably with a window that opens
- Put cushions, towels or bedding at the bottom of the door to block smoke
- Open the window and call for help
- If smoke is affecting the room you are in get as low as you can where the air will be safer to breathe
- Call 999 and ask for the fire service informing them where you are and that you are unable to escape

If a fire breaks out elsewhere in the building when you are in your flat:

- It will normally be safer for you to stay in your own flat
- Keep your front door closed, call 999 and give the number of your flat
- Seal your front door from smoke with towels or bedding and close any ventilators
- Open a window if you need fresh air and stay by the window where you can be seen



Fire safety when cooking

Kitchen fires are one of the most common causes of domestic fires and can easily take hold if food is left unattended. To reduce the risk of an injury or fire from cooking, please follow the advice given in this section:

- Take extra care if you have food cooking and need to leave the kitchen - always take pans off the heat or turn them down to avoid risk
- Take care if you're wearing loose clothing - they can easily catch fire. You should also keep tea towels and cloths away from the cooker and hob
- Use spark devices to light cookers - they are safer than matches or lighters because they don't have a naked flame
- Double check the cooker is off when you've finished cooking
- Keep the oven, hob and grill clean – a build-up of fat and grease can catch fire
- Never put anything metal in a microwave – it can spark and cause a fire
- Take care when cooking with hot oil - it sets alight easily
- If cooking oil starts to smoke - it's too hot. Turn off the heat and leave it to cool
- Use a thermostat controlled electric deep fat fryer – they can't overheat
- Never throw water over a chip-pan fire

**For independent fire safety
advice, contact: West Midlands
Fire Service 0800 389 5525**







Electrical safety

As your landlord, we have a legal duty to ensure that the wiring in your home and any equipment owned by BCHG and provided for your use is safe. We carry out periodic checks of the electrical wiring in your home and test portable appliances in communal areas. However, you are responsible for any electrical equipment you have brought into your home and how you use it. To reduce the risk of an injury or fire caused by electrical faults you should follow the advice given in this section.

- Only buy electrical appliances and chargers from a reputable source and always check for a British or European safety mark
- Don't overload plug sockets or adaptors. An extension lead or adaptor will have a limit to how many amps it can take so be careful not to overload them - try to keep to one plug per socket.
- Check your sockets regularly - if you see burn marks or they feel hot please contact us on 0300 555 0302 to arrange an inspection
- Check the electrical current rating of electrical adaptors before you plug appliances in and make sure that the total current used does not exceed the adaptor's rating
- Don't put electric heaters near curtains or furniture and don't dry clothes on them or cover the air vents on heaters
- Don't trail flexible cables under carpets or rugs – you won't be able to see any damage



- Regularly check for frayed or worn cables and wires. Check to see if the cable is fastened securely to the plug and check the socket for scorch marks. You should always carry out these checks before you use an appliance
- Switch off appliances at the socket when not in use. Switch off appliances when you go to bed or when you go out unless they are designed to be left on (e.g. fridge freezer)
- Keep electrical appliances clean and in good working order. Look out for fuses that blow, circuit breakers that trip for no obvious reason and flickering lights
- Don't use electrical appliances near water and never touch electrical appliances with wet hands
- Don't use water on an electrical fire. Pull the plug out or switch the power off if it is safe to do so and call the fire brigade

For more information on electrical safety, visit the Electrical Safety Council's website www.esc.org.uk/public.



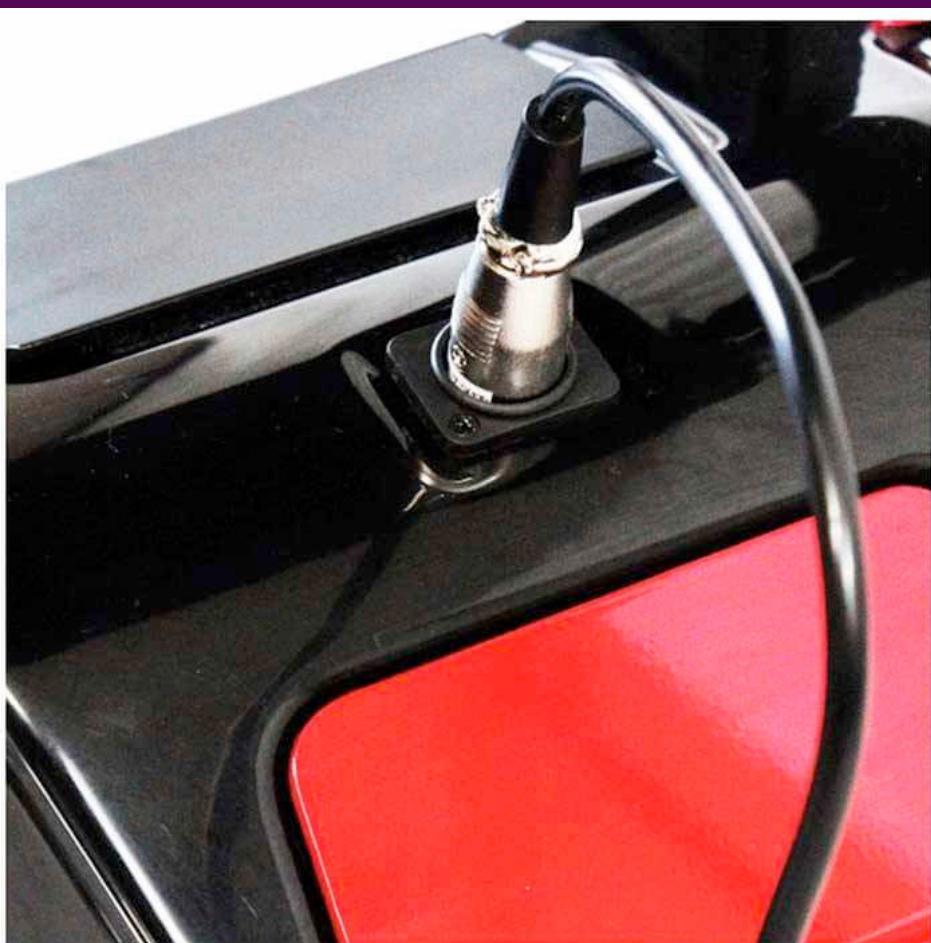
Mobility scooters

Mobility scooters can be a fire hazard if they are not stored and charged correctly. They will only be allowed in buildings where it can be safely stored and charged without affecting the safe escape from the property in the case of fire.

If you have a mobility scooter, you should let us know so that we can update our records.

Storage

Mobility scooters must not be stored in communal corridors or communal areas in blocks and sheltered schemes. In some buildings, mobility scooters can be stored inside your flat where access is available. Before you get a new scooter you must let us know and check that there is sufficient space to store it safely. It should not block your fire escape route or cause an obstruction to any visitors. If you store your mobility scooter outside a communal building, it must not cause a risk to any other residents or visitors, for example, by blocking fire escape routes.



Charging and maintenance

Mobility scooters must not be charged in the communal corridors or communal areas. They should only be charged within your own home and according to the manufacturer's instructions. Charging should only be carried out during day time hours and not overnight. Mobility scooters should not be left unattended while charging. You must ensure that your scooter is serviced and maintained regularly and be able to show us evidence of this if requested.

Compressed gas

Unless for medical reasons, you must not use, permit to be used or store compressed gas within your home or any communal areas. Gas in cylinders can become a major hazard in a fire and must be stored safely at all times. If you are required to use and store compressed gas for medical reasons, i.e., oxygen, you must inform us and the fire service. You can call 0800 389 5525 to arrange a Home Safety Check with the Fire Service to discuss the safe storage of compressed gas. Always refer to the manufacturer's instructions when using or storing compressed gas.



Water hygiene

We make sure that our water systems are installed and maintained to the highest standards.

However, if your home has been empty for a long time, there is a chance that the quality of your water may be affected by the growth of bacteria, which occurs naturally from time to time in the mains supply. Situations where this could happen include:

- If you have been away on holiday
- If you have been in hospital
- If there are water outlets such as showers, taps or hose pipes that are not used regularly

In sheltered housing schemes and other communal blocks, we ensure that the communal facilities, empty properties and guest rooms are flushed weekly. We also arrange for regular inspection and maintenance of the water system. You can contact your Scheme Manager or Customer Relations Manager or email compliance@bchg.co.uk if you are concerned.

What is Legionella and Legionnaires disease?

Legionella is a naturally occurring bacteria present in water. Although the risk is very low, there is a chance that Legionella bacteria can develop in stagnant or stored water in your home. Legionella bacteria can survive at low temperatures and develop quickly at temperatures between 20°C and 45°C. High temperatures over 60°C kills Legionella bacteria. Legionella can affect anyone but some people are at higher risk, including those over 45, smokers and heavy drinkers, people suffering from chronic respiratory or kidney disease, and people whose immune system has been weakened.

How do people get it and what are the symptoms?

If you inhale water droplets which contain the bacteria, you can become ill. Legionella causes serious lung infections, while Legionnaire's disease causes similar but less serious conditions.



Symptoms of Legionnaires disease are a high fever, muscle pain and chills, and possibly a persistent cough, chest pains and breathing difficulties. The disease cannot be passed from one person to another.

What do I do if I think I have Legionnaires disease?

If you develop these symptoms and you are worried that it might be Legionnaires disease, see your doctor explaining why you are worried. If you are diagnosed with Legionnaires' disease, please contact us urgently by visiting www.bchg.co.uk/contact-us.

What can I do to reduce the risk of Legionella?

This applies to all customers whether you live in a house, flat or scheme.

You can make sure that your water stays safe by following these simple steps:

- Keep your hot water hot. Make sure that the thermostat on your hot water system is set to a minimum of 60°C and leave it on for at least one hour before use. (Take care when using your hot water to avoid scalding).
- Avoid stagnation by keeping your water moving. Any hot or cold tap, or any shower, that is not used at least weekly should be flushed through for two minutes on your return to the property.

- Turn the taps on slowly and take the shower head down, if it is on a flexible hose, to avoid splashing and the release of water droplets.
- Any toilet that is not used within a seven-day period should also be flushed on your return to the property. Close the lid to avoid contact with any water droplets.
- Keep it clean. Shower heads and taps should be cleaned at least 4 times per year and disinfected to ensure no scale or algae build up, which could help the bacteria to survive.

Make sure that lids are on water tanks in the loft to stop contamination, and that the tank is insulated to keep it cold. If you have any concerns regarding the quality of the water supply in your home, or for advice on how best to flush your taps and shower, please contact us by visiting www.bchg.co.uk/contact-us or by emailing compliance@bchg.co.uk.



Gas Safety

As your landlord, we have a legal duty to ensure that all gas appliances, fittings and flues owned by Black Country Housing Group and provided for your use are safe. This includes things like central heating, boilers and gas fires.

To do this, we must carry out an annual gas safety check or gas service using registered Gas Safe engineers. We will notify you in writing when your gas safety check is due and arrange an appointment to complete the gas servicing.

What does a gas safety check involve?

The annual gas safety check will include testing of all required gas appliances, pipe work, flues and smoke alarms in your home. We will provide you with a copy of your gas safety certificate within 28 days of the check being completed.

What if an appliance fails the safety check?

The Gas Safety Record will contain details of any problems found at the time of the inspection, and any action that has been taken.

If an appliance fails the safety check, it may be necessary to disconnect it. Our engineer will make the appliance safe whilst on site in this circumstance. We will then contact you to discuss and agree any further actions and when we will complete them.

If one of the appliances that you own is faulty, we will disconnect it and advise you to seek help from a qualified Gas Safe Registered engineer.

What to do if you smell gas?

If you smell gas or suspect, there is a gas leak you should:

- Turn off the appliance you are using
- Turn off the gas supply at the meter (unless the meter is located in a cellar or basement, in which case you should evacuate immediately)
- Check to see if a gas tap has been accidentally left on or if a pilot light has gone out
- Open doors and windows to allow the gas to disperse
- Call Cadent on 0800 111 999 immediately



You should not:

- Use or switch any electrical appliances on or off
- Smoke, use matches or anything that has a naked flame
- Use a mobile phone anywhere near the leak

How can I tell if my gas appliance is faulty?

Any one of the following could be a sign that your gas appliance is faulty and may be producing carbon monoxide in your home:

- The flame on your cooker should be crisp and blue. Lazy yellow or orange flames mean you need to get your cooker checked
- Dark staining on or around gas appliances
- Pilot lights that frequently blow out
- Increased condensation inside windows

You should contact us immediately on 0302 555 0302 if you think that your gas appliance is not working properly.

Carbon monoxide

If you have a faulty gas appliance, it can be dangerous and produce carbon monoxide gas. This is a colourless and odourless gas, which can cause headaches, dizziness, nausea, breathlessness and loss of consciousness. Exposure to carbon monoxide can also be fatal, so you should seek medical advice immediately if you have these symptoms. We recommend that you install a carbon monoxide alarm in your home if you have gas appliances.

What if you have gas but no gas appliances?

If you have a gas supply meter fitted in your property, but do not have any gas appliances, we still need to inspect the pipework inside your home.

Gas safety tips

- Make sure you know where your gas meter is located and how to turn off the gas supply in the event of an emergency
- Never cover an appliance such as a boiler or gas fire or block the air vents
- Never block or obstruct any fixed ventilation grilles or airbricks
- Never block or cover outside flues
- Never fit draught exclusion strips to doors of a room that contains a gas appliance
- Never use a gas appliance if you think it's not working properly and never cover gas appliances

Your gas safety responsibilities

You must allow us access to your home to complete your annual gas safety check. If you do not allow us access you will be in breach of your tenancy agreement and we will take legal action. This may result in you losing your home. If you employ anyone to carry out gas work in your home, you must ensure they are a registered Gas Safe engineer.

You must never attempt to do any gas related work or repairs yourself. Not only could you be breaking the law, but any work you carry out could be life threatening for you and your neighbours.







Asbestos management

What is asbestos and why was it used?

Asbestos is a naturally occurring mineral found in rock. It was used in building products in the UK particularly during the 1960s and 1970s because it is very strong and resistant to heat and chemicals. The use of asbestos materials was stopped in 1999 but any building built before 2000 may contain asbestos. Asbestos is only dangerous if it gets damaged or disturbed.

Why is asbestos dangerous to people?

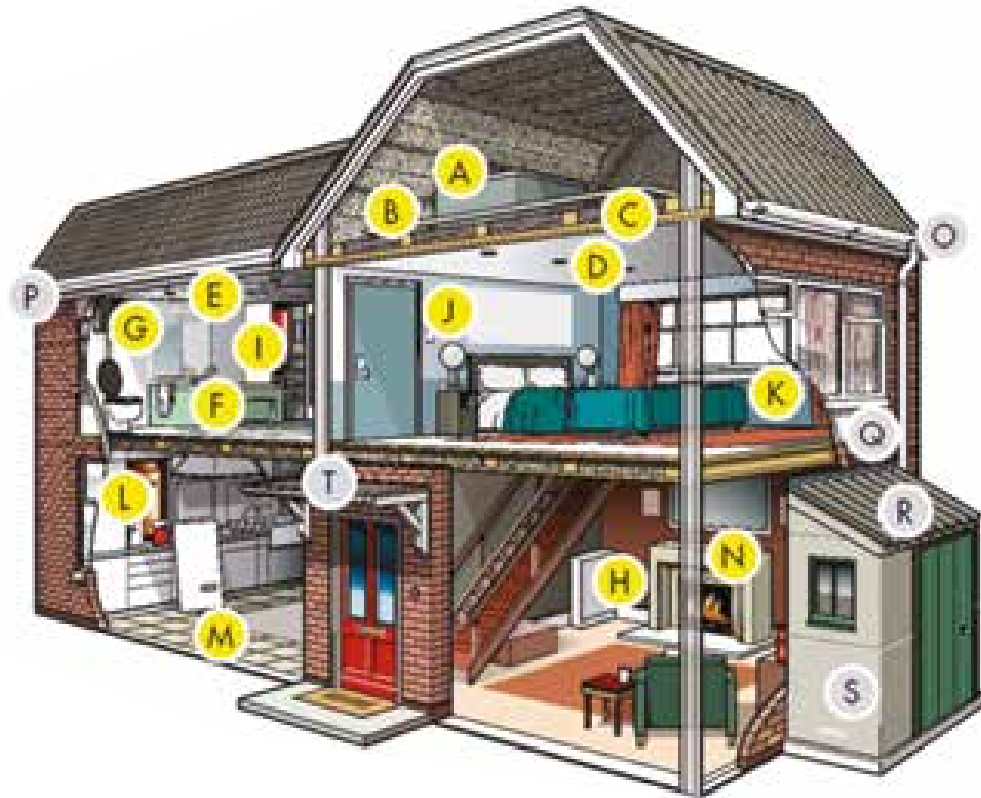
If you have asbestos in your home, you do not need to be worried. If it is in good condition, it is not usually a problem. Asbestos only becomes dangerous when it is damaged or disturbed. This is because it releases invisible fibres into the air. If we breathe in these fibres, they can get stuck in the tissues of the chest or lungs. This can cause diseases including Asbestosis and Mesothelioma.

Leave it to us

If you suspect you may have disturbed asbestos or have found a suspected asbestos product and are worried that dust may be released, please leave the room where the suspect material was found, close the door to that room and contact us on 0300 555 0302. We will discuss and assess the situation with you and agree the best course of action.

Do I have asbestos in my home?

The picture below shows you the places asbestos may have been used in typical a property, both inside and outside. However, not all properties will have asbestos in all these locations and your home may not have any asbestos at all.



Man-made mineral fibre (MMMF) loft or cavity wall insulation does NOT contain asbestos.

Inside

- a) Asbestos cement water tanks
- b) Pipe lagging
- c) Loose fill insulation
- d) Textured decorative coatings
- e) Asbestos Insulated Board (AIB) in ceiling tiles
- f) Asbestos cement bath panel
- g) Toilet seat and cistern
- h) AIB behind fuse box
- i) AIB airing cupboard and/or sprayed insulation coating the boiler
- j) AIB partition wall
- k) AIB interior window panel
- l) AIB around boiler
- m) Vinyl floor tiles
- n) AIB behind fire

Outside

- o) Asbestos cement gutters and down pipes
- p) Soffits AIB or Asbestos Cement
- q) AIB exterior window panel
- r) Asbestos cement roof
- s) Asbestos cement panels
- t) Roofing felt

How are we managing asbestos in your home?

If asbestos is not damaged and still doing its job by strengthening and fire-proofing, it's safest to leave it in place. Where asbestos is a hazard, we make it safe by enclosing it or removing it. This is what the law and government policy says is best practice.

We carry out surveys on our properties to find out if they contain asbestos and what condition it is in. We'll let you know when our trained asbestos surveyors are going to be carrying out these surveys. We'll also tell you about the results. If we find asbestos in your home, we'll take one of these actions depending on the level of risk:

- We will remove it
- We will enclose, cap or seal it
- We will make sure any contractors asked to work on your property knows where the asbestos is so they do not disturb it

If we need to remove the asbestos, we'll let you know where it is and what to do in the meantime. But remember, asbestos is not a risk unless it is disturbed or damaged.

Ask before you DIY!

You must let us know if you are planning home improvements. We can check our records and see if your home is likely to contain asbestos and where it is.

If you or anyone else carries out work on your home without our permission, you may have to pay to get the asbestos cleaned up and made safe if you damage it.

Remember, this is an important part of your tenancy agreement. Let us know about your DIY plans otherwise you will be in breach of your tenancy agreement.

What are your responsibilities?

- You must not undertake any significant building related works on your property without first confirming with us that it is acceptable and safe to proceed
- Building works, including redecoration, are a likely source of disturbance of asbestos products so caution must be exercised when planning and undertaking such works
- You must not deliberately damage, drill, saw, sand or strip any area that might contain asbestos. Remember that floor tiles containing asbestos may be underneath floor coverings and should not be disturbed
- You must inform us immediately of any asbestos materials that are damaged or disturbed in your home

If you have any concerns regarding asbestos or if you think you may have disturbed asbestos in your home, please contact your Customer Relations Manager or call 0300 555 0302. Alternatively, you can email: compliance@bchg.co.uk.





Want to get in touch?

Please feel free to visit, or message us using one of the contact options below.



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Housing Group**

How to contact us:



T: 0121 561 1969



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