

A Landlord's Guide to the Housing Health and Safety Rating System

The Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) was introduced in England and Wales in April 2006; it replaces the Housing Fitness Regime as the way in which local authorities ensure that homes don't pose a risk to their occupants. When a local authority identifies a serious health and safety hazard under HHSRS it can order the landlord to make immediate improvements to remove the hazard, or even shut the property down altogether.

What does the HHSRS include?

There are twenty-nine categories of hazard included in the HHSRS. These include:

- Excess cold/heat
- Damp and mould growth
- Pollutants such as asbestos, carbon monoxide and lead
- Lack of space, security or lighting, or excessive noise
- Poor hygiene, sanitation or water supply
- Accidents such as falls, electric shocks, fires, burns and scalds
- Collisions, explosions, structural collapse

How does the rating scheme work?

Each hazard is given a score rating based on the likelihood of it causing major harm to the most vulnerable person who might typically occupy the dwelling.

Combatting excess cold

Excess cold is the most common hazard found by local authorities when they carry out HHSRS assessments. Excess cold is a particular issue for older properties which may not be well insulated or which lack modern heating systems.

What are your responsibilities?

As a landlord you should make sure that all your properties are free from the risks to health and safety identified in the HHSRS.

In the case of excess cold, you should make sure that your tenants can afford to heat their homes. No tenant should be at risk of ill-health or discomfort because their home is too cold.

Removing the risk of excess cold by improving the energy efficiency of your property

The best way to prevent your properties being identified as a risk to your tenants because of excess cold is to improve the insulation and heating system. That way your properties will need less energy - and money - to keep at a comfortable temperature.

Improving the insulation of your properties will help to keep the heat in. In particular, by installing cavity wall insulation or solid wall insulation you would be able to cut the heat loss down substantially. Similarly, installing or topping up the roof insulation can reduce heating bills by up to £110.

You can also look at installing a new, more efficient heating system with good programmeable controls and thermostatic radiator valves. Your tenants will get more control over their heating and a more comfortable living environment. Your options might include: a separate heating programmer, room thermostats, a combined programmable room thermostat, a cylinder thermostat as well as thermostatic radiator valves.

Accessing grants for energy efficiency improvements

If your tenants are on benefits in England, you may be eligible for grant funding for energy efficiency measures under the government's Warm Front programme of up to £2 700. Under Warm Front, privately rented properties can benefit from insulation and even a whole new heating system on a free or nearly-free basis.

You can find out more about Warm Front by calling 0800 316 2805 or online at www.warmfront.co.uk.

Are grants available in Wales?

Grants are available under the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme, and the criteria are very similar to those in England. However, the value of the grant could be as much as £3,600 and if your tenant is living in Wales and is over 80 years old, your tenant won't need to be in receipt of any benefits to automatically qualify for HEES Plus

If you are in Wales, find out more about HEES by calling 0800 316 2815 or visit www.heeswales.co.uk

How does your tenant qualify ?

If your tenant is receiving any of the following benefits you could receive a Warm Front or HEES grant to improve the energy efficiency of your home.

1. Householders aged 60 or over in receipt of one or more of the following benefits:

- Income Support
- Council Tax Benefit
- Housing Benefit
- Job Seekers Allowance (income-based)
- Pension Credit

2. Householders with a child under 16, or pregnant women with maternity certificate MAT-B1, in receipt of one or more of the following benefits:

- Income Support
- Council Tax Benefit
- Housing Benefit
- Job Seekers Allowance (income-based)
- Pension Credit

3. Householders in receipt of one or more of the following benefits:

- Working Tax Credit (with an income of less than £15,460, which must include a disability element)
- Disability Living Allowance
- Child Tax Credit (with an income of less than £15,460)
- Housing Benefit (which must include a disability premium)
- Income Support (which must include a disability premium)
- Council Tax Benefit (which must include a disability premium)
- War Disablement Pension (which must include a mobility supplement or Constant Attendance Allowance)
- Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit (which must include a mobility supplement or Constant Attendance Allowance)
- Attendance Allowance

Are there any grants available from the energy suppliers?

The energy suppliers are offering grants and discounts worth £1.5 billion over the next 3 years, as part of the Government's Carbon Emissions Reduction Target (CERT) being made available for the installation of home insulation and improve home heating systems.

Not only will CERT help households overcome the increasing energy costs but the energy savings achieved will help the government towards its targets for reducing carbon dioxide emissions as well as delivering affordable warmth. Energy savings can be achieved using a range of measures including:

- Cavity wall insulation
- Loft insulation
- Condensing boilers
- Low energy lighting (CFLs)
- Energy efficient appliances

Information on CERT is available from your energy supplier or visit

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/climatechange/uk/household/eec/#cert>

Information on all grants that might be available can be found at:

<http://www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/proxy/view/full/2019/grantsandofferssearch>

What happens if you refuse a grant?

Despite the fact that grants for new heating and insulation are made on a free or nearly-free basis, some landlords still refuse to have measures installed under Warm Front and other energy efficiency grant programmes.

If you do fail to grant permission for Warm Front installations, be aware that the installing company may - together with your tenant - make contact with your local authority's Environmental Health department. In these cases, the Environmental Health Officers will see the fact that you refused grant funding for improvements as a good reason for an HHSRS inspection. And following an inspection you may be ordered to make improvements at your own cost - your ability to access grant funding for improvements will be more limited.

Where can I get more information?

You can find out about the HHSRS from your local authority or by visiting

www.communities.gov.uk/hhsrs.

The Energy Saving Trust can provide you with a personalised Home Energy Check report on each of your properties for free. Simply complete the questionnaire today and you should have your report very soon. The questionnaire is available at:

www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/proxy/view/full/165/homeenergycheck