

You and your home



Emergencies



Belfast City Council

These numbers are for emergency and security issues only. If we set up an emergency call centre, we will publicise this.

During office hours:
028 9027 0428

Out of hours:
078 5049 9622

Fire, police, ambulance and coastguard
999

Crimestoppers
0800 555 111

Northern Ireland Housing Executive
03448 920 901

Northern Ireland Electricity
08457 643 643

NI Gas Emergency Service
0800 002 001

Flooding Incident Line
To report serious flooding
0300 2000 100

Waterline
08457 440 088
For general queries and reporting any problems with your water supply

Foreword

I am very pleased that Belfast City Council has developed this 'Protect your home' resource.

Our homes provide shelter and protection from the elements. However, it is very important that we protect our homes to minimise the risk of damage to them, and to ensure they continue to provide refuge for all who dwell there.

The extreme weather conditions we have experienced in Belfast over the past few years have highlighted the need for us all to have measures in place to protect ourselves, and our homes at all times of the year.

We all need to be able to deal with the problems and issues we encounter when an emergency occurs in the home. I cannot stress the importance of knowing your home, of being familiar with basics such as being able to locate and operate the electrics and water mains.

Everyone should also have a Home Emergency Life-saving Plan (HELP); this is essential to ensure everyone in your household knows what to do in a sudden crisis.

This booklet will give you information about protecting your home, and yourself and provides important contact details for advice and guidance on this. It also provides important numbers which you can use in an emergency.

Remember, prevention is always better than cure so act now, read the information in this booklet, contact us, ask about any worries or concerns you have about your home, and start making changes to 'Protect your home'.

Clr Pat McCarthy
Chair of Health and Environmental Services Committee

Introduction

Our homes are our castles, and it is very important that we know how to keep them safe and in good repair.

We have produced this booklet to help keep you, your family and your home safe. This booklet explains how to make an emergency plan, helping you decide what you should do if you find yourself in an emergency situation such as flooding or an evacuation.

Here you will also find information to help you manage the many issues householders are faced with throughout the year - for example, who do you call when you have a frozen or burst pipe, an oil leak, or even a flood?

From knowing how to work your home heating systems to driving in icy conditions, you will find lots of useful information in this booklet. Hang on to it so that you can refer to it whenever you need to.

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Where can I get information in an emergency?

Web

www.belfastcity.gov.uk/emergency

Facebook and Twitter

www.facebook.com/belfastcitycouncil
www.twitter.com/belfastcc

Radio

Tune in to your local radio station.

Digital TV

Virgin Media

Interactive, News & Info, Looking Local

Sky

Go to channel 539 and press the red button



Take a closer look

In your home you should be able to locate certain things such as the stopcock and thermostat, and you should also know how to operate them.



Electrical mains and trip switches

You should always locate your trip switch and fuse box when you first move into a property (in case an emergency occurs). Modern electric circuits are fitted with a circuit breaker fuse system. Where a fault develops, a switch is tripped. If you have a trip switch, it will be on or near your fuse box and your fuse box will always be near your electricity meter.



The first thing you should do in the event of a power cut is check your trip switch, wiring and appliances. You can also check to see if your street lights or neighbour's lights are on. If the problem persists and it seems that there is no fault in your premises you should call NIE on 08457 643 643.

If there is water leak in your premises you should not touch any electrical appliances or the fuse box.

If water enters your home, do not operate electrical switches or appliances. Don't touch electrical fittings such as sockets and meters.

In a flood it is likely that the mains electricity supply will go off. You should keep a battery-powered torch and a battery-powered radio just for such an occasion.



It would also be useful to have a landline phone which does not need a mains electricity supply.

You should report power cuts to Northern Ireland Electricity on 08457 643 643.

Stock up on food

Have a stock of food and hot drinks; keep basic food items in the cupboard or freezer in case it's too cold to go shopping. Remember to check the shelf life of these products.



The stopcock

A stopcock (sometimes called stop valve) is used to shut off the flow of water in a pipe. It is usually found in the kitchen, under the sink unit. However, in some houses it is found in the front or back hall. Most stop valves are turned off by turning it to the right, but you should check this out, making sure you know how to do this in an emergency.

NI Water has produced a bright tag for customers to loop around the stop valve in their premises. This will ensure that the location of the stop valve is easily identifiable in the event of a burst pipe. Stop valve tags are available free to customers by phoning NI Water on 08457 440 088 or emailing waterline@niwater.com



Heating thermostat

Most of us spend a lot of time indoors in winter, so it's important that you are comfortable and safe. Get to know how the timer and thermostat on your heating system work.



Set your heating to the right temperature; 18–21°C or 64–70°F should keep your home warm and your bills as low as possible. If it's very cold, set the timer to switch the heating on earlier rather than turning the thermostat up to warm your house quickly. Close the curtains and fit thermal linings if you can.

Buy an internal thermometer from a hardware store, typically they cost £10 and they help keep the temperature in your home between 18 and 21°C. If the temperature falls below 18°C elderly and less active people could succumb to hypothermia.

Have an emergency kit

Make sure you have an emergency kit prepared that you can lift and take with you in any emergency. It can also be helpful if you have an emergency in your home or if you are unable to leave your home. You should make sure that everyone living in the house knows where it is.

Below is a list of suggested items for your emergency kit.

- List of useful phone numbers (such as your GP)
- Copy of your Household Emergency Life-saving Plan (HELP). You can get this from the back of this booklet or from our website.
- Copies of important documents like birth certificates and insurance policies
- Home and car keys
- Toiletries, sanitary supplies and prescription medicines and a list of medications you are currently taking and the dosage (keep this up to date)
- Battery-powered or wind up radio
- Battery-powered or wind up torch, candles and matches
- Spare batteries
- First aid kit
- Mobile phone and charger
- Cash and credit cards
- Spare clothes and blankets
- Bottled water, ready to eat food, a bottle or tin opener and food for your pet

You should also ensure that you have a phone that doesn't need mains electricity to work. Cordless phones will not work if the electricity supply is affected.



Get home insurance (buildings and contents)

Every householder should have home insurance to protect their property and contents from fire, flood, theft and other disasters.

Home insurance is usually made up of two separate policies, one for buildings and one for contents. You can buy them both from the same insurance company or you can get them from two different insurers. You can buy home insurance from most major insurance brokers, but you should always choose a broker who is registered through the Financial Services Authority (FSA) - www.fsa.gov.uk

If you own your own home you should have both building and contents insurance.

If you live in rented accommodation (public or private) you should have contents insurance. Your landlord should have buildings insurance on the property.

If flooding cover is included in your policy, you will be able to claim against your insurance and be reimbursed for the cost of any flooding damage.

If you have oil heating it is important to check that your policy covers domestic fuel spills.

Although it is a good idea to shop around for insurance, the cheapest policy may not always give the best cover. Always make sure that the sum you are insured for is up to date. Other policies may exclude items that have been subject to wear and tear.

If you buy a new expensive item for your home or carry out home improvements,

you may need to update your policy. Always read your policy fully to check the different levels of cover offered.

Make sure that you are not under insured. If you have not insured your possessions for their true value, your insurance company may not pay out the full amount of your claim. You are responsible for making sure that what insurers call 'the sum insured' is enough to cover the cost of a disaster. The sum insured is the maximum amount the insurance company will pay out, if everything you own is totally destroyed by a fire or flood.

In the UK:

- the average annual household spend on a buildings insurance policy is £205,
- the average annual household spend on a contents insurance policy is £172, and
- the average annual household spend on a combined buildings and contents insurance policy is £351.

(Taken from the UK Government's 'Expenditure and Food' survey conducted in 2006, ABI predict average annual spend to remain stable since 2006.)

i For independent insurance advice, contact the Association of British Insurers on 020 7600 3333 go to www.abi.org.uk

You can also contact our Advice Centre for more information on 028 9032 8260

Smoke and carbon monoxide alarms

Make sure your smoke alarm and carbon monoxide alarm are working and check the batteries every week.



Carbon monoxide

The subject of carbon monoxide poisoning has been a recurring theme in the local press this year. Many of us have now bought carbon monoxide (CO) detectors. But there are other things we should do to stay safe.

Carbon Monoxide can be released by any appliance that burns oil, solid fuel, wood or gas. If you have heating appliances in your home, make sure that you:

- get them properly installed and serviced at least once a year (by an approved installer or engineer),
- get your flues and chimneys swept to remove any blockages (by a competent chimney sweep), and
- keep any permanent ventilation openings clear.

If you haven't bought a carbon monoxide detector yet you should still get one. They are widely available from DIY and hardware stores. When buying a carbon monoxide detector, make sure that it has these symbols:



Always follow the manufacturer's instructions on the best place to fit the detector, how to test it and when to replace it (according to the manufacturer's instructions).

As the biggest risk occurs when you are sleeping, make sure you place the detector somewhere where you can hear the alarm from your bedroom.

If you suspect a carbon monoxide leakage in your home, switch off the appliance, and if you have a fire allow it to go out. Open all doors and windows and get an approved contractor to check the appliance(s). Do not use the appliance(s) until you are certain the leakage has been fixed.

Our environmental health officers can offer advice on staying safe or can visit your home and monitor carbon monoxide levels if you have concerns.

i For more information or to find out the signs of carbon monoxide www.belfastcity.gov.uk/publichealth or contact the Building Control Technical Helpline on 028 9027 0432.

Buying smoke or heat alarms

When you buy smoke or heat alarms, make sure they meet a British Standard (BS) or International Standard Organisation (ISO) Standard. Self-contained smoke alarms must meet BS 5446 Part 1:2000 and self-contained heat alarms must meet Part 2:2003.

Automatic fire-detection and alarm systems must meet BS 5839 Part 6:2004.

Look for the BS Kitemark or the CE mark with the standards displayed (see page 8). If you cannot see either of these marks, do not buy them. **And never buy second-hand smoke alarms.**

You must fit self-contained smoke and heat alarms in:

- all new homes,
- extensions to existing homes, and
- roof-space conversions.

In all new homes, the alarms must be either permanently wired to an electric circuit fused separately at the distribution board, or permanently wired to a lighting circuit that is used regularly. In both cases, there must be a back-up power source.

We recommend that you get a qualified person, such as a NICEIC-registered electrician, to install any mains-powered alarms.

You should fit heat detectors in places where the use of self-contained smoke alarms is not recommended. This includes kitchens, garages, and places where steam, condensation or fumes could lead to false alarms.

Smoke alarms

Since the introduction of the standard that domestic properties must have a smoke alarm, the number of deaths (caused mainly by inhaling smoke), has been dramatically reduced.

The Building Regulations (Northern Ireland) state that domestic properties should have smoke alarms in the hall and landings. Changes to the Building Regulations (Northern Ireland) mean that since 3 October 2005 all new homes must have an extra smoke alarm fitted in the main living room, and a heat detector fitted in the kitchen.

Maintenance

We cannot make sure that you maintain any smoke or heat alarm but it is important that you regularly check them to make sure they are working properly and check the manufacturer's instructions for more information.

If you need any help please phone the Building Control helpline on 028 9027 0432.

Register intruder alarms



Intruder alarms are a great way of protecting a home from burglaries. However, some alarms can go off for no apparent reason and when there's no-one at home, the noise can be really irritating for neighbours.



If you register your intruder alarm with us we can check these details if we receive a complaint about a noisy alarm. If we have the key holder details we will contact them to come and sort the noisy alarm out, if possible.

alarm. A locksmith may also be required if the alarm cannot be switched off from outside the building. You could end up getting billed for the costs incurred to silence your faulty alarm, whether it's a dwelling or commercial building.

However, without key holder details, we may have to get an engineer to silence the

i If you are bothered by noise, you can call our Noise Hotline during the day or night on 9037 3006.

Follow the tips below to help protect your property and make sure your neighbours are not disturbed:

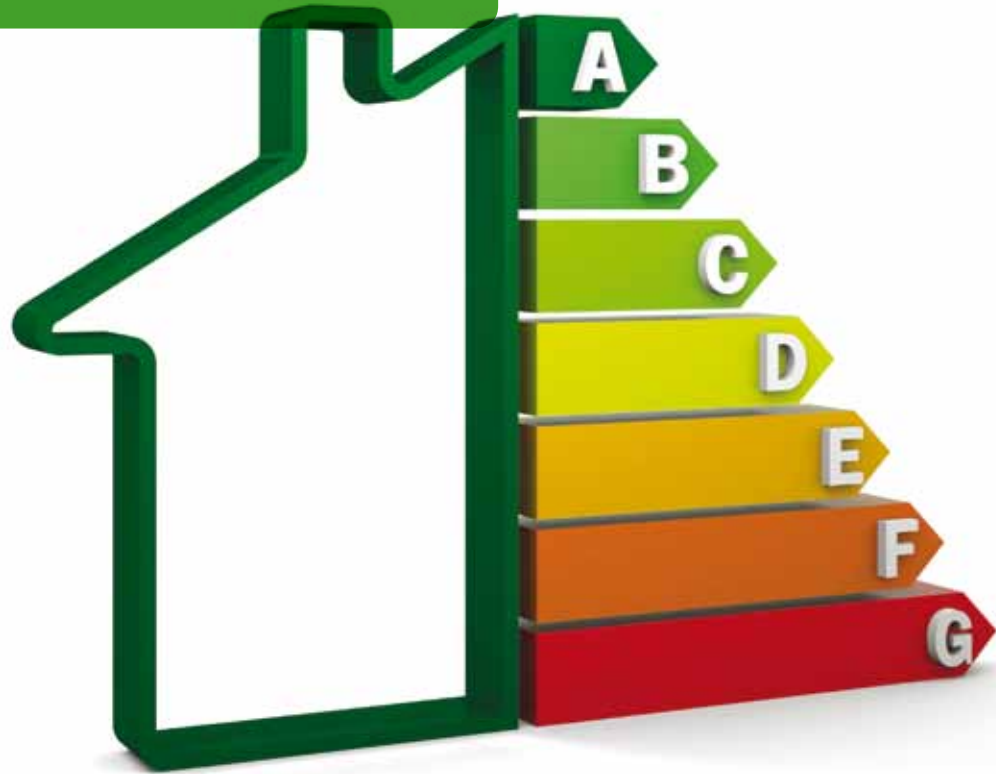
Make sure your alarm is fitted with a cut-out device to stop it ringing after a period of 20 minutes. (The alarm shouldn't go off again until it has been manually reset and the reason why it was sounding resolved).

Register your keyholder details on our website at www.belfastcity.gov.uk/noise/alarms.asp Alternatively you can ring our Noise Hotline on 9037 3006 for a key holder registration form.

The key holders must be contactable by phone, live within 20 minutes travel time and know how the alarm system works! Also, don't forget to notify us if you move or change key holder details.

Have your alarm system checked regularly under contract by a professional company.

Get an EPC



An Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) is an energy labeling system which measures the energy efficiency of buildings; it is similar to the system used on white domestic goods.

An EPC provides a rating A to G for the energy performance of a building.

A is very good, meaning the building costs less to heat

G is very poor, meaning the building costs more to heat

An EPC is required when a building is being put on the market for sale, or rental, or when a building is constructed or significantly renovated.

Sales and rentals

Any property being marketed for sale or rent must have a valid EPC to allow prospective buyers or tenants to take into consideration the energy efficiency of the property. It is the property owner or landlord's legal duty to obtain an EPC and to provide it free of charge to any prospective buyer or tenant.

New build

The builder or person responsible for the construction of a new building must ensure the owner of the building and the local building control service receive a copy of a valid EPC for the building within five days of completion of the building.

Significantly renovated

If a building is converted into more or fewer units, or if there are changes to the hot water, heating, air conditioning or ventilation services then an EPC is required. The builder or person responsible for the renovation works to the existing building must ensure that the owner of the building and the local building control service receive a copy of a valid EPC for the building within five days of completion of the works.



Recommendation report

An EPC is accompanied by a report and a list of recommendations for possible improvements. The report will include costings for each recommendation as well as typical savings and a resulting rating if the recommendations are carried out. These improvements do not have to be carried out, but if they are, the building will be more energy efficient. It will cost less to heat, and light the building and to heat its water.

Of course the amount of energy actually used in a building also depends on the life-style choices of the people living in or using the building, for example how much you use your central heating, how high you set the temperature thermostat and how much you use electrical appliances.

EPCs are valid for 10 years and must be:

- from an accredited energy assessor; and
- recorded on the Northern Ireland Register www.niepcregister.com

Accredited energy assessors and enforcement

An EPC can only be produced by a competent and accredited energy assessor who is accredited to produce EPC's. For details of accredited energy assessors contact any energy accreditation scheme who hold a list of accredited assessors or visit www.niepcregister.com It is advisable to shop around for competitive rates.

Local Authorities have the power to fine individuals £200 if they fail to provide a valid EPC.



For further information visit www.epb.dfpni.gov.uk or www.belfastcity.gov.uk/buildingcontrol/EPC.asp and you can also call our Building Control Technical Helpline on 9027 0432.

Home heating systems

Having efficient and well maintained home heating systems means you will be able to stay warm throughout any cold spells.

Healthy boilers

It is important to have your central heating boiler serviced, whether it's gas or oil.

Boilers which are serviced annually will be far more reliable, efficient and will be in optimum condition. Servicing also helps to reduce the running costs and minimise the risk of breakdown, which can be extremely expensive to put right.

Most people service their boiler at the start of winter; however it is much better to service your boiler before this, instead you should contact the boiler service company at end of the summer.

Common problems with an inefficient oil boiler may be:

- excessive build-up of soot producing heavy black smoke which exhausts from balanced and open flues, this can lead to blockages and produce carbon monoxide which is highly dangerous;
- worn oil nozzles and oil pumps;
- glazed photocells components (safety feature which monitors the flame); or
- worn ignition electrodes.



During the service the oil boiler engineer will inspect and make sure that all parts and associated components are correctly working and that it's burning oil efficiently. They may also check the condition of the oil tank and pipes.

When selecting your engineer remember anyone servicing a gas boiler must be Gas Safe Registered and we recommend anyone servicing an oil burner is Oftec registered. This gives piece of mind that the service will be carried out by a competent engineer.



Replacing your boiler

Old oil or gas boilers are likely to be unreliable and will cost more to run than a modern energy efficient boiler. Replacing your old boiler with a new one can reduce your fuel bills and also reduce your home's carbon emissions.

Recent changes to the building regulations mean that all new and replacement oil and gas boilers must be energy efficient condensing boilers. Condensing boilers are more energy efficient than conventional boilers as the otherwise wasted heat from flue gases is extracted, using heat exchangers, and used to help heat the water in your central heating system.

So, if you are getting new central heating or a replacement boiler make sure you get an energy efficient condensing boiler that complies with the current regulations. Don't allow a substandard cheaper boiler (they may still be available in some builders' suppliers and DIY stores) to be installed in your home as it won't be cheaper in the long run.

And make sure you apply for Building Control approval - we are here to help make sure you get a safe and energy efficient central heating system in your home.

You need Building Regulations approval for:

- installing new heating appliances,
- upgrading an existing central heating system,
- replacing a boiler,
- converting an existing central heating system (for example from solid fuel to oil), and
- maintenance work such as fitting a new flue.

i For more information contact the Building Control Service on 9027 0432 or visit our home improvements section at www.belfastcity.gov.uk/buildingcontrol

If you have wood-burning, coal or gas heaters, make sure you have adequate ventilation

Keeping warm



Home heating and water

Keep your home as warm as possible, even if it is unoccupied.

Set your heating to the right temperature; 18–21°C or 64–70°F should keep your home warm and your bills as low as possible.

Think about keeping your trap door open in very cold weather as this can prevent pipes and storage tanks in your roofspace from freezing.

Lag any pipes which are fitted in exposed or draughty areas.

Check to make sure taps are turned off properly, especially late at night.

Save oil stamps

According to NI Housing Executive research, 45% of people in Belfast now live in fuel poverty. This means that they spend more than 10% of their income on heating their home.

This figure has increased from 38% in 2006, with older people much more likely to be affected. Most people in Northern Ireland use oil to heat their homes and since 2003, oil prices have soared by 150%.

If you or someone you know is suffering from fuel poverty, why not take part in our Be Warm saving stamp scheme to help you budget for your fuel costs.

You can buy £5 stamps from over 50 outlets across the city, including shops, post offices, credit unions and leisure centres. If you buy the stamps all year round, it can help you spread the cost of your heating bills and take the pressure off in the cold winter months.

Stamps are accepted by 25 oil companies as payment or part payment for oil, so you can still shop around for the best deal.

Visit www.belfastcity.gov.uk/bewarm for more information.



Fuel

If you have oil-fired central heating make sure you do not let your oil tank run out, as this may cause it to airlock. An airlock will stop your heating working and can cause a lot of hassle to free up.

Check the level of oil in your tank regularly using a dip stick or make sure you have your gas metre topped up enough to see you through any cold spell.

Remember oil suppliers may be restricted in their ability to distribute oil in bleak conditions.

In an emergency heating oil drums can be bought in most fuel stations, however it is usually much more expensive to buy oil this way.

Oil is expensive, so to spread the cost of refilling your oil tank over the year save our £5 Be warm oil stamps.

Solid fuels

With the colder weather and the increase in home heating bills, you may be making more use of your open fire.

But be kind to the environment and avoid a hefty fine by making sure you burn the right type of fuel.

All residential areas in Belfast are covered by smoke control orders. This means that it is an offence to emit smoke from a chimney, a furnace, or any fixed boiler.

To make sure you comply with the law you should only burn authorised fuels (smokeless fuels) in your fire or heating appliance.

You should never burn:

- smoky coals,
- peat turf,
- logs, or
- non-authorised peat briquettes.

If you do burn these fuels you could be committing an offence and could be fined up to £1,000.

You can burn authorised smoke-free coals, authorised briquettes and you can also use kindling to start your fire.

To make sure you burn the correct fuels and use the right types of appliances in smoke control areas visit www.uksmokecontrolareas.co.uk or www.hetas.co.uk

There are some appliances (certain types of wood burning stoves for example) that are exempt from the controls. You can find a list of these appliances at

www.uksmokecontrolareas.co.uk

You can also contact our Environmental Protection Unit for help and advice on 028 9027 0420.



Electric blankets

Last winter we carried out electric blanket tests at a series of home safety events for seniors. Out of the 78 blankets we tested 60 of them failed – that’s a staggering 77%!

If your blanket or any part of the wiring shows any of the following danger signs, you should have it checked or replaced:

- fraying fabric,
- scorch marks,
- exposed elements,
- creasing or folding,
- soiling,
- damp patches,
- tie tapes damaged or missing,
- worn flex, or
- loose connections.

You should also replace it if it has an old BEAB safety mark (a round symbol) as this means it’s more than 10 years old. The new sign has the letters ‘BEAB’ in a round-cornered rectangle.



It’s cheaper to replace a worn electric blanket than it is to replace your home,

so if you’re in any doubt about the condition of your blanket, bin it and buy a new one.

Make sure your blanket is tested by an expert at least every three years. Ask the shop where you bought it about testing and servicing.

We offer free home safety checks all year round. Our advisors will carry out a room-by-room inspection of your home and provide tips on all aspects of home safety, as well as specialist advice on topics like heating and energy saving.

i For more information about home safety checks or to book a free home safety check, call 9091 8715 or go to www.belfastcity.gov.uk/homesafety

Remember: NEVER use a hot water bottle along with an electric blanket.



Insulate homes

Having your home insulated is an easy thing to do to keep your home warm while cutting your fuel bills and reducing the chances of damp forming. You can draught-proof doors and windows, insulate the loft and walls and lag the hot-water tank and pipes.

Here are a few tips:

- Insulate your loft but don’t block the opening under the eaves.
- Consider installing cavity wall insulation.
- Install secondary and double glazing to reduce heat loss and draughts through windows.
- Keep low-background heating on all day, particularly during winter, even when you are not at home.

Before you do any insulation work to your home you should contact our Building Control Service on 028 9027 0650 to check if you need approval.

There are grants available from the government and energy suppliers to help heat and insulate your home.

Contact the Warm Homes Scheme to find out if you are entitled to help for home energy improvements. If you are in receipt of Pension Credit, Disability Living Allowance, Attendance Allowance or Housing Benefit, you may be eligible. Visit www.warm-homes.com or call free 0800 988 0559 (Housing Executive and Housing Association tenants do not qualify).

Bins and rubbish



Store waste in the correct bin and present it for collection on the appropriate day to avoid unwanted pests.

If you don't know when your bin is due to be collected you can call our customer contact centre on 9027 0230 or email refusecollection@belfastcity.gov.uk to find out.

If you have a kerbside recycling box it is collected by Bryson Recycling and you can call 9084 8494 for collection details.

Don't forget to leave your bins out by 7am and keep them out until 8pm to make sure they are collected.

Return your bins to your property after they have been collected to avoid vandalism or theft.

i We also provide a free bulky waste collection service (for large items such as fridges or sofas) to domestic households in the Belfast City Council area. You can call us on 028 9027 0230 to arrange a free collection.

Here's a basic summary of our bin collection patterns:

If you have a black bin and blue bin

- They are collected on the same day on alternate weeks.

If you have a black bin, blue bin and brown bin

- Black and brown bins are collected on same day (by different vehicles) every other week to your blue bin.

If you have a black bin and kerbside recycling box(es)

- Both are collected weekly, but separately and may be collected on different days.

If you have a black bin, a kerbside recycling box(es) and food waste caddy

- Black bins are collected fortnightly. Kerbside recycling boxes and food waste caddies are collected weekly, on same day (by different vehicles).

Rat prevention

Nobody wants rats or mice in or around their property so here's some useful tips to help you avoid them.

Rubbish:

- ✓ Make sure you have a bin(s) in good condition.
- ✓ Put all household waste into the appropriate bin and close the lid.
- ✓ Don't leave any waste lying around your bin or in your yard.

Pets:

- ✓ Clean up any left over animal food after feeding.
- ✓ Store all animal food indoors or in a lidded container.
- ✓ Clean up dog fouling daily.

Garden:

- ✓ Keep gardens tidy and take all garden waste and recyclables to your local recycling centre.
- ✓ Clear away litter and leaves from under low level decking.
- ✓ Pick up windfall fruits and berries.
- ✓ Only use properly designed composters with a lid.

Home:

- ✓ Check your property's walls for holes and fill them in with cement.

Things to avoid:

- ✗ Don't overfill your bin.
- ✗ Don't forget to put your bin out on the correct collection day.
- ✗ Don't leave manholes or gullies uncovered.
- ✗ Don't put meat scraps in your composter.



Pigeons

Avoid feeding wild pigeons. Pigeon dirt can damage your property, and can cause pathways to become slippery. Scattered bread crumbs may attract rodents.

If you throw food out for birds sometimes the pigeons will eat the food, but more often than not the food is left as litter in streets or parks. It looks unsightly, creates more work for street cleaners and may be a health hazard attracting insects and rats. And remember, littering is an offence and you can be fined for throwing food on the street.

i We offer a free pest control service for rats and mice for domestic households in the Belfast City Council area. Call us on 028 9027 0431 to arrange a visit.

Flooding – be prepared

Flooding can happen at any time of year. So, if you live in an area which is prone to flooding, there are lots you can do to protect your home from heavy water damage.

See the Household Emergency Life-saving Plan (HELP) at the back of this booklet.



Before flooding:

- Write a flood plan to remind you what you need to do such as what belongings you would move.
- Make up an emergency kit. This should include a torch, waterproof clothing, a battery-powered radio, a list of useful phone numbers and a copy of key personal and business documents.
- Get some flood protection equipment in advance. For example buy your own sandbags or keep some suitable items for blocking doorways and airbricks.



During flooding:

Please remember that flood water presents serious risks and dangers. Six inches of water could sweep you off your feet. Two feet of water can lift and float a car.

- If the flood water is getting higher, go to a safe place. Either go upstairs or move out to friends or family or to an emergency support centre if one has opened. Remember to bring ID documents and essential medications with you.
- Check if your neighbours or relatives need any help, particularly if they are elderly or vulnerable.
- Call the Flooding Incident Line on 0300 2000 100 to report flooding of your street or house.
- Call the emergency services on 999 if you think someone's life is in danger.



After flooding:

Our website has lots of practical information on what you should do once the water has subsided from your house or business. Call us on 0800 707 6965 to report any damage to your home or property.

Condensation

Many householders find condensation appears worse in cold weather. If you find patches of mould on walls, ceilings, furnishings or clothing, and you have no leaks in the room, condensation may be the cause.

Condensation on walls and ceilings often causes mould which is often black with a speckled look. It can cause health problems if left unattended.

It is a common problem during cold weather, especially in older buildings. It can be seen as droplets on windows or pools on window sills and is most commonly found in:

- bathrooms and kitchens,
- on cold north facing walls,
- near or on windows,
- in or behind cupboards or wardrobes, or
- behind curtains and furniture where there is little air movement.

To prevent condensation you should try to do the following:

To produce less moisture:

- cover boiling pans,
- dry washing outdoors or in the bathroom or kitchen with the door closed and the window open,
- vent tumble dryers to outside (unless self condensing), and
- avoid using portable gas heaters.

To ventilate and remove moisture:

- open windows as wide as possible and use extractor fans when kitchens and bathrooms are in use,
- don't overfill cupboards,
- make sure items are dry before putting them away,
- position wardrobes against internal walls, and
- keep a small window or a trickle vent open in other rooms you are using.

To keep the heat in:

- keep low background heating on all day in really cold weather, if possible, and
- insulate and draught-proof your home to retain heat. Do not block permanent ventilators.

If you do come across mould, wipe down the walls, window frames with an approved fungicidal wash (making sure that you read the instructions carefully). You should then redecorate with an anti-fungal paint.

i For more information about condensation or damp, call us on 9027 0428 or go to www.belfastcity.gov.uk/publichealth

Drying clothes

You should also avoid drying clothes indoors, however, if you have no alternative, here are a few tips to help dry your clothes and avoid condensation in your home:

- Dry your clothes on a clothes horse. This will allow you to dry more clothes in a space with good ventilation. Place the clothes horse in a room you may not be using, open the windows for ventilation. Think

about security if you go out, and depending on the weather, you may need to turn on a radiator to give added heat.

- Never place a clothes horse, or any damp clothes in front of an open fire or electric bar fire.
- Do not use a portable gas heater.
- If you use a tumble dryer, make sure you vent the warm moist air outside (unless the dryer is self-condensing).

Icy conditions and severe cold weather

During cold weather, safety on our roads becomes even more important. Take the time to check the weather forecast before travelling.

Driving in icy conditions

It may be best to avoid long trips during icy conditions. But we know that on some occasions, driving during freezing weather conditions can't be avoided.

So we've brought together some tips to help you reach your destination safely:

- To improve visibility, before you set off make sure your windscreen and roof are completely clear of ice and snow.
- When going on a longer journey, make sure you bring food and hot drinks, warm blankets and a fully charged mobile phone.
- Slow down! Allow at least three times more space than usual between you and the car in front.
- Brake gently to avoid skidding. If your wheels start to lock, ease off the brakes.

If you get stuck in snow:

- do not spin your wheels – this will only dig you in deeper. Turn your wheels from side to side a few times to push the snow out of the way.
- use a light touch on the accelerator to ease your car out.
- use a shovel to clear snow away from the wheels and underside of the car.
- pour sand, gravel or salt in the path of the wheels – or even your foot mats – to help get traction.

If you must leave your car, arrange to have it recovered as soon as possible. If you think it is in a place that may cause danger to other road users, call the police to make them aware.

Sand and grit

Keep a supply of salt and sand handy to put on your steps or paths in icy weather. You can buy this from any DIY store for under £2 per 25kg bag.

People often ask if legally they can clear snow and ice. There is no law stopping you from clearing snow and ice on the pavement outside your home or from public spaces.

In 2010, the Attorney General of Northern Ireland advised if you clear snow or ice carefully you are unlikely to be held liable.



It is easier to clear ice or snow early in the day before it becomes packed together from people walking on it. You should never use water to melt snow or ice as it may refreeze and turn to black ice which is invisible and very slippery.

External maintenance

Clean drains, gullies and spoutings around your house

As we normally get more wind and rain in autumn and winter months leaves and other materials can often gather in drains, gullies and spoutings.

These materials can block or partly block drains, gullies or spoutings and can increase the risk of flooding or damp to your house. However, if you clear them regularly and make sure that your drains and spoutings are clear from debris then this risk can be greatly reduced.

It is every householder's responsibility to clear all their drains and to make sure they work properly.

If you need more information on how to clear your drains contact our Public Health and Housing Section on 028 9027 0428.

Check for slipped slates, unstable chimney stacks and other roofing problems which could cause a risk of injury to you or the general public particularly during windy conditions.

If you get a frozen pipe

- Turn off the main stopcock (sometimes called stop valve).
- Put hot water bottles or a thick cloth, soaked in hot water, over the frozen pipe. Never use a naked flame.
- Begin at the end of the pipe (nearest the tap) and work your way along the pipe.

If you get a burst pipe

- Turn off the main stopcock.
- If you can't stop the flow of water, drain the system by opening all your cold taps.
- If the burst pipe is at your storage tank, turn off the stopcock (sometimes called stock valve) to the pipe supplying water to the tank and any stop valves supplying water to the rest of the house.
- If the leak is on the central heating system, turn the appliance off and if the central heating uses a solid fuel fire, allow it to burn out.
- Drain the system by turning on all your hot taps, if needed.
- Turn your heating off until a plumber has examined the burst pipe.

If the leak has been occurring for a while take care that affected ceilings are not ready to collapse.

You can get a free stop valve tag from NI Water to loop around your stop valve to make it easier to locate when you need it. Phone NI Water on 08457 440088 or email waterline@niwater.com

What to do...



If you get an oil leak

You will recognise an oil leak by:

- a strong smell of solvent, petrol or oil inside or outside your home or in your cupboards,
- black stains and dead plants or grass around your tank, or
- a sudden increase in the amount of fuel you use.

If you discover a leak, try to find out where the leak is coming from and collect the oil in a container. Open windows and switch off your oil supply. Contact a plumber straight away. If the leak could affect a stream, call the Water Pollution Hotline on 0800 807 060.

i For further advice contact our Public Health and Housing Section on 028 9027 0428.

Belfast City Council services

Other housing related areas that our Building Control Service looks after include:

Building regulations approval for construction work such as:

- new buildings,
- extensions, roof space conversions, removal of internal walls and chimney breasts and structural alterations,
- installing heating appliances,
- installing thermal insulation in cavity walls or roof spaces,
- changes to drainage and bathrooms,
- a change of use of a property (for example from a shop to a dwelling).

A host of other things such as:

- dangerous structures,
- open and vacant properties,
- enforcement of Energy Performance Certificates (EPCs), and
- Display Energy Certificates (DECs),
- street naming and building numbering,
- dual-language street signs,
- property certificates for conveyancing.

i Contact Building Control on 028 9027 0650 or email buildingcontrol@belfastcity.gov.uk

Our Environmental Health Service deals with complaints and enquiries about a range of public health and housing issues, including:

- enforcement of fitness standard of private rented properties,
- investigating complaints of unlawful eviction and harassment,
- investigating public health complaints or queries regarding damp, fumes, disrepair, rubbish and blocked toilets,
- enforcement of repair requirements in rented properties,
- enforcement of rent book and tenancy statement regulations.

We also offer a free pest control service (for rats, mice, cockroaches, flees, flies and bedbugs) to all households in the Belfast City Council area. We can also help with other pests such as wasps but there may be a charge.

We offer free home safety checks which are aimed primarily at the elderly and young families.

i Contact Environmental health about your housing issues on 028 9027 0428 or email envhealth@belfastcity.gov.uk



In the event of a major emergency, it may be some time before the emergency services can help you. So it's important that you and your family or housemates have made preparations to take care of yourselves in emergency situations. You should make a plan in advance.

General things to remember in an emergency

- Stay calm, reassure others and think before acting.
- Call 999 if people are injured or if there is a threat to life.
- Do not put yourself or others in danger.
- Follow the advice of the emergency services.

In the event of fire or danger

If there is a fire or danger in your building, quickly and calmly leave the building by the nearest safe route and move to a safe place away from the building.

Do not try to return to the building until the emergency services tell you it is safe to do so.

If it is safe to stay in the building

- Go in - go indoors and close all windows and doors
- Stay in - stay indoors
- Tune in - to local radio, TV or the internet, where public information and advice from the emergency services will be broadcast.

Belfast Resilience
INTEGRATION - CO-OPERATION - DIRECTION

Turning off supply

Allocate a household member to find out how the following utilities work and turn off the supply if necessary:

Electricity:
Water:
Gas:

Remember your neighbours

You should check on your neighbours – they may need YOUR help. Make sure you have their details so that you can contact them in an emergency.

Neighbours to the left

Name:
Home number:
Mobile number:

Neighbours to the right

Name:
Home number:
Mobile number:

Important emergency contact numbers

Save the emergency phone numbers on your mobile phone so that you can get them quickly.

Emergency Services:
999 or 112

Belfast City Council:
(office hours) 028 9027 0428
(out of hours) 07850 499 622

Northern Ireland Housing Executive:
03448 920 901

Northern Ireland Electricity:
08457 643 643

NI Gas Emergency Service:
0800 002 001

Northern Ireland Water Waterline:
08457 440 088

Flooding Incident Line:
0300 2000 100

Sometimes during an emergency, a dedicated helpline will be set up. When this is set up, the number will be published in the media and online when possible.

Local radio stations

BBC Radio Ulster **94.5FM**
Downtown Radio **102.6AM**
Cool FM **97.4FM**
Citybeat **96.7FM**
UI05 **105.8FM**

Complete the following important information you might need in an emergency:

	Name or location	Contact number
Doctor		
Social worker or care manager		
Work		
School		
Vet		
If we have to leave our home or become separated, we will go to:		
Option 1 (walking distance)		
Option 2		
If we get separated from each other and cannot return home, we will meet at:		
Option 1		
If we are unable to get in contact with each other, we will leave a message with:		
Option 1		
Option 2		
Who will pick up the children from school in an emergency?		
Option 1		
Option 2		

	Company	Contact Number	Policy Number
Home Insurance			
Contents Insurance			
Car Insurance			



Household Emergency Life-saving Pack

In case of a major emergency it is very useful to have an emergency pack containing:

- battery radio with spare batteries or a wind up radio
- battery torch with spare batteries or a wind up torch
- candles and matches (remember to use candles and matches safely)
- first aid kit
- list of useful phone numbers such as your GP and family members
- list of the medications you are currently taking and the dosage (keep this up to date)
- copies of important documents like birth certificates, insurance policies and this plan
- bottled water and ready-to-eat food (tinned food), with a can opener if required.

Make sure you have a phone that doesn't need mains electricity to work. Cordless phones will not work if the electricity supply is affected.

In case you are advised to evacuate your home, you may want to add the following to your emergency pack:

- prescribed medication
- toiletries, sanitary supplies
- mobile phone and charger
- cash or credit cards
- playing cards, games or some form of entertainment
- any special equipment for infants or people with special needs
- home and car keys
- spare clothes and blankets.

Don't forget about your pets and their equipment, such as a carrier, collar, lead and pet food. **If possible, take your pets with you as the emergency may last a long time.**



For more information on planning for major emergencies in Belfast, go to:
www.belfastresilience.co.uk

You can also get lots of information on what to do in emergencies on the NI Direct website: www.nidirect.gov.uk

This leaflet will be made available on request in accessible formats such as Braille, audio formats and large print. It will also be provided in minority languages to meet the needs of those who are not fluent in English. If you need any further assistance please contact Belfast City Council on 028 9027 0428.