Guide to your new home

A practical guide to looking after your new home

NHBC

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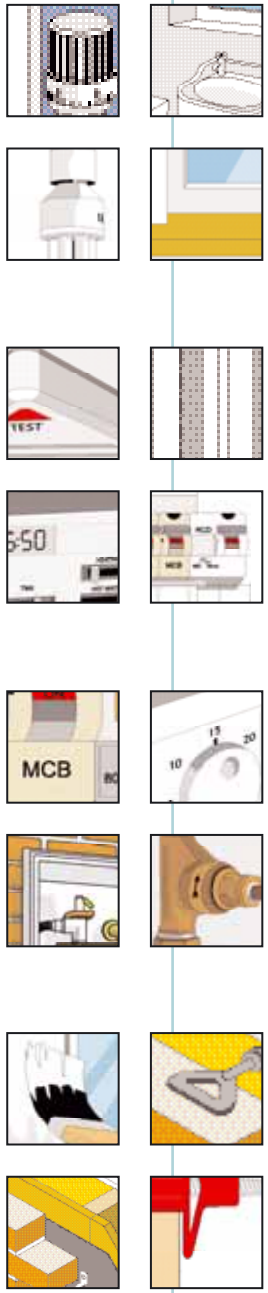
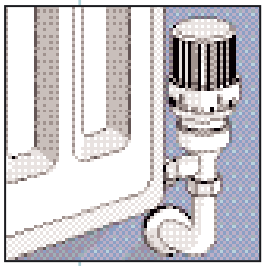




Section 1 : Introduction

This guide has been written and produced by NHBC and provides useful advice and information to help you look after your new home.

NHBC is the standard setting body and leading warranty and insurance provider for new homes in the UK, providing risk management services to the house-building and wider construction industry. Our role is to raise the standard of new homes and to provide consumer protection for new home buyers.

This guide is not part of the Buildmark policy documents, although it does provide advice on who to contact if you have a problem with your new home.

Following the advice in the 'Running-in your new home' section will help you to avoid some of the common teething problems associated with a new home. In the unfortunate event that more serious problems or defects in the construction of your home occur, please consult your Buildmark policy for detailed advice on what to do.

Please read 'Moving in' immediately.

This guide provides general advice and guidance only. As a result, the advice may not be appropriate in all circumstances. For example, if you live in sheltered housing, you should always consult the warden before attempting any maintenance or repair work.

Whatever type of home you have, it is important not to attempt any repairs or maintenance work that may be too difficult for you, or which put you at risk. Electrical and plumbing work should only be carried out by competent people. Gas work should only be carried out by CORGI (Council of Registered Gas Installers) registered installers.

Section 2 : Buildmark

Buildmark is the insurance and warranty cover provided by NHBC for your new or newly converted home. The Buildmark policy belongs to you, the homeowner, and you should make sure your solicitor or conveyancer hands the policy to you. If you do not receive your copy, ask for it.

We strongly recommend that you take time to read the policy, and ask your legal adviser to explain any items that require clarification. Alternatively if you have not received your policy, please contact NHBC Customer Services on 01494 735363.

The Buildmark policy is valid for 10 years, usually from the date of legal completion of the first sale of the home (or date of entry in Scotland). The date may differ if the home has been built under an individual building contract.

So what should you do if you have a problem with your home?

The Buildmark policy explains the process in detail, and this is briefly summarised below.

During the first two years of the policy

If you have a problem with your home during the first two years of the policy, you should notify the builder in the first instance (keeping a copy of any correspondence) telling him about the damage or defects to your home. The builder is responsible for putting right any defects (as defined in the Buildmark policy) during this two-year period. If the builder fails to meet his obligations, contact NHBC Claims on 0870 241 4329 or visit www.nhbc.co.uk/claims/claimsonline.

Years 3 to 10

Please contact NHBC Claims on 0870 241 4329 to discuss your concerns, or contact us via www.nnbc.co.uk/claims.

Note: This guide is not a legal document and does not form part of the Buildmark policy. It is for information purposes only. Consult your Buildmark policy for full details of cover provided.

Section 3 : Moving in

Inspection on moving in

On the day you move in, it is important to inspect your new home carefully throughout, paying particular attention to:

- sanitary ware (including baths, basins and wcs)
- glass (including windows, mirrors and shower screens)
- fireplace surrounds
- kitchen fittings and appliances
- wall tiling
- carpets, floor tiling and laminated flooring.

Some builders will ask you to sign a form to confirm that all these items are in order. This is reasonable, because the time to report things like a crack in a pane of glass or a chip in the bath has to be on the date you move in. Later on, it may be impossible to prove who caused the crack or the chip. But, having bought a new home from an NHBC Registered Builder, signing a form will not take away your rights to have the builder put right defects you could not reasonably have been expected to see at the time of moving in or defects that come to light or develop later on.

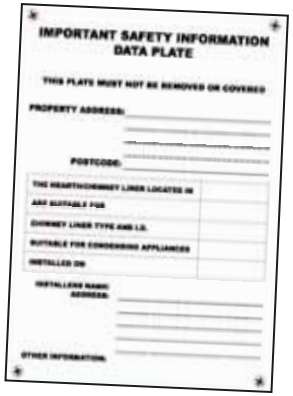
You should also check to confirm that:

- you have been given the correct keys for all locks, and that windows and doors open, close and lock properly.
- any 'extras' you ordered have been provided.
- all services (gas, water and electricity) are connected and are in working order. You should also agree meter readings with the builder.
- your builder has given you a 'homeowners health and safety card', and you know where the various stopvalves and the electrical consumer unit are located.

Within the first few days

Shortly after moving in you should:

- familiarise yourself with the operation of the smoke detectors and check they work by pressing the test button.
- check that you have been given operating instructions for heating and other fittings and appliances and know how to work them.
- check that the garden boundaries are correct.
- in the case of flats and maisonettes check that the common parts have been completed properly by the builder. Your solicitor/conveyancer should have told you what these are, but they usually include stairways, landings and entrance areas.
- if a chimney or flue has been installed in your home, check that a notice plate, giving information on types of appliances that can be safely installed and used, has been provided.


IMPORTANT SAFETY INFORMATION
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You are advised to bring any matters of concern to the builder's attention. To avoid delays in getting your concerns dealt with, you should follow the builder's after-sales procedure.

Legal rights and obligations

Your solicitor/conveyancer should have told you about your rights under Buildmark and about planning restrictions, restrictive covenants, tree preservation orders and ownership and maintenance of fences, shared drives, etc. If you want further information on these matters you should ask your solicitor.

Contractual disputes

Disputes over matters of contract should be handled by your

solicitor/conveyancer. NHBC cannot help with disputes about date of entry, boundaries, price of 'extras', plot size, room dimensions, colour of sanitary ware or type of floor coverings. Similarly, problems arising out of rights-of-way and access, and matters of legal title to your property should be referred to your solicitor/conveyancer.

Standards of finish

A new home is an individually-built hand-crafted product. For this reason there will inevitably be some variation in the finished appearance of different elements of the construction and a lack of uniformity, due to the nature of the materials used and the ways in which they are applied. This is normal and to be expected.

NHBC requires work to be carried out in accordance with the NHBC Standards, in a proper, neat and workmanlike manner.

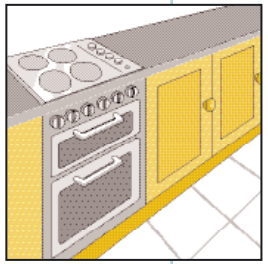
Judgements about the suitability of finishes achieved can be subjective. Some materials such as timber do alter in size and shape as they dry out and settle in use.

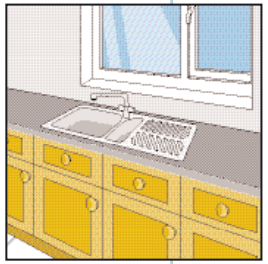
To help explain what the appropriate standards of finish are, NHBC has issued a technical guide to its inspection and claims staff, and to its registered builders.

Entitled 'A Consistent Approach to Finishes', the guide advises how finishes on many elements of a new home should be viewed, and the extent to which variations and changes are acceptable or normal.

The guide makes particular reference to the finishes of brickwork, internal plaster, render, and paint work. It also provides guidance on some of the effects that drying out of the components and fabric of the building will reasonably produce.

If you would like to receive a free copy of 'A Consistent Approach to Finishes', or require further information, please contact NHBC Customer Services on 0845 845 6422, quoting reference number HB1262.





Section 4 : Running-in your new home

New homes should be run-in gently over the first few months. This is because concrete, bricks, timber, plaster and other materials will have absorbed water during construction. You may not be aware of it, and it certainly will not do you any harm, but it does need to evaporate slowly and be ventilated away.

Drying out

As your home is lived in and heated, timber and other materials will shrink and this can cause small cracks on wall and ceiling finishes. These cracks are not structurally significant and can be put right in the normal process of redecoration. However, because such minor cracks are inevitable, the builder is not required to rectify them. It is in your own interest, therefore, to follow the advice given here.

To minimise cracking, try to keep a reasonably even temperature throughout your home, even in rooms which are not occupied. If you move in during winter months try to use the central heating sparingly at first, so that the structure of your home warms up and dries out gradually. Depending on how your home has been built and the weather conditions, this may take several months.

Your home needs to be kept well ventilated to allow moisture to evaporate as the structure dries out. Leave windows or, at least, the trickle vents (slotted vents in the window frame) open for as long as you can each day.

Efflorescence

A consequence of drying out may be the appearance of a white deposit on walls, called 'efflorescence'. This is caused by natural salts coming out of the wall materials and is quite normal. It is not harmful and usually disappears over time. If efflorescence occurs on internal walls it can be wiped or brushed away.

If efflorescence persists internally, it could indicate a water leak, in which case you should contact the builder.

Reducing condensation

Condensation is caused by steam or water vapour when it comes into contact with cold surfaces (in the same way that steam in the bathroom condenses on the window). Condensation is common in new and newly converted homes while construction materials dry out. If allowed to persist it can sometimes cause mould on walls and ceilings. In exceptional circumstances, condensation and mould can damage clothes, bedding, floor coverings, decorations and the home itself.

Once materials have dried out, you should no longer experience significant condensation. However, normal daily activities produce a great deal of water vapour, which may cause condensation if allowed to spread around the home.

In cold weather you may notice some moisture on the felt under the roof tiles of your home. This is due to warm moist air from inside your home passing through the ceiling and condensing on the cold timber or felt, and should gradually disperse.

The following advice should help reduce condensation:

1 **Produce less moisture**

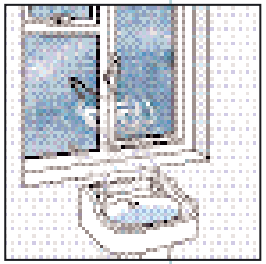
- Cover pans when cooking to reduce steam.
- Avoid drying clothes indoors over radiators. Put washing outdoors to dry if you can. If you use a tumble dryer, make sure that it is vented to the outside air (unless it is a self-condensing type). DIY vent kits are available.

2 **Stop moisture spreading through the home**

Use the cooker hood and/or extractor fans and keep the doors closed when cooking, washing, bathing and drying clothes indoors.

3 **Ventilate moisture away**

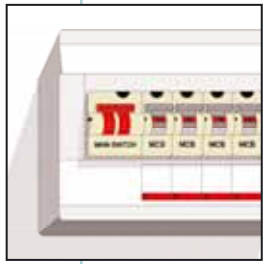
Ventilation is needed to get rid of the moisture that is naturally produced every day in your home. The trickle vents (slotted vents in the window frames) are intended to provide constant 'background' ventilation and should be left open when rooms are occupied.

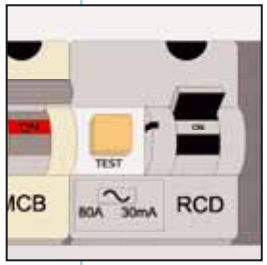


4 Provide even heating

Homes where the heating is off all day because the occupants are out, are more likely to suffer condensation problems than those heated more continuously. This is because, when normal activities such as washing and cooking are carried out in the evening, the home has been unheated for long periods and so surfaces are cold.

Make sure the central heating timer is set so that your home is warm by the time you return home. During very cold weather it is better to leave the heating on during the day to maintain an even temperature. The temperature can be set a few degrees lower and turned up when you return.





Section 5 : Essential services

Electricity

Electricity is normally supplied through an underground cable, which is connected to your electricity meter. Cables leading from the meter are connected to your consumer unit.

The consumer unit contains the main on/off switch and a number of miniature circuit breakers (MCBs), which protect individual circuits. MCBs are provided to automatically disconnect the supply of electricity if one of the circuits is overloaded or if there is a fault. They can be reset by returning the switch to the 'on' position.

In addition there may be a residual current device (RCD) which provides additional shock protection particularly for appliances

used outside the home. An RCD which has 'tripped' can be reset by returning the switch to the 'on' position. The correct operation of the RCD should be checked from time to time by pressing the 'test' button.

If a miniature circuit breaker or residual current device trips repeatedly this may indicate a fault with an appliance or the installation. You should call a competent electrician to investigate the cause of the problem, and not keep resetting an MCB or RCD that trips repeatedly.

Electricity is distributed around the home by cables, which are normally concealed in floors and walls. The builder should have run all cables that are not protected by metal conduit (pipe) in the following areas of the wall:

- Vertically above or below a socket outlet or switch being served
- Horizontally either side of the socket or switch
- Horizontally in a band within 150mm (6") of the ceiling
- Vertically in a band within 150mm (6") of the corner of a room in each wall.

Cables may run in any position above a ceiling or under a floor.

Before fixing to walls, floors and ceilings always check for buried pipes and cables using a detector available from DIY stores.

Water

Water is supplied by the water company through an underground service pipe which is fitted with a stopvalve at the boundary to your property for use by the water company in an emergency. As it enters your home, its flow is controlled by the main stopvalve, which allows you to turn off the supply in an emergency or for maintenance. The 'homeowners' health and safety card' should show where the stopvalve is located.

It is important for you to know where the main stopvalve is.

From your stopvalve water enters the 'rising main' and is distributed around the home via an indirect or direct feed system.

Indirect feed system

The rising main supplies water to a storage cistern, usually in the loft. From there, it is fed by gravity to the taps, wc cisterns and the hot water cylinder. Usually, only the kitchen tap is connected directly to the rising main for drinking water.

A close-fitting cover and insulation should be provided to the water storage system. These should not be removed.

Direct feed system

All cold water taps and wcs are fed from the rising main. Hot water is provided at mains pressure by an unvented hot water storage system or a combination boiler.

Never attempt to service or alter an unvented system yourself. An explosion could result.

To check whether your system is direct or indirect, close the main stopvalve. If the system is direct, the flow will stop all cold water taps and WCs; if indirect, only the kitchen sink will be affected.

Gas

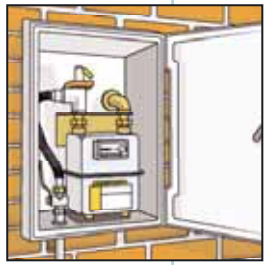
Gas is brought into your home through a service pipe that terminates at the control valve by the meter.

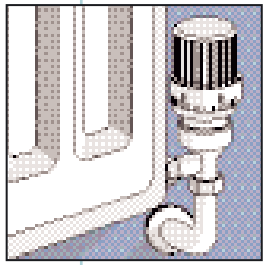
The gas meter is usually outside the building; either on the wall or partially buried in the ground. Your builder should have given you a key to open the meter cupboard so you can turn off the gas in an emergency, or read the meter.

Gas is distributed to the central heating boiler and other gas appliances through pipework, which may be concealed in floors and walls.

The installation and repair of gas appliances should only be carried out by a CORGI (Council of Registered Gas Installers) registered installer.

Before fixing to walls, floors and ceilings always check for buried pipes and cables using a detector.





Section 5 : Essential services

Your central heating system

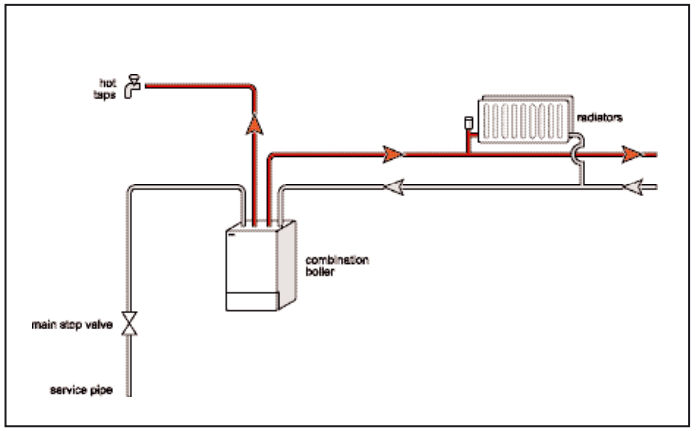
Many homes are fitted with a hot water central heating system, consisting of a boiler and radiators, a pump and controls. Water heated by the boiler is pumped around the radiators through pipework that is usually concealed in the floors and walls. You should have been given operating instructions for your central heating system by the builder.

Before fixing to walls, floors and ceilings always check for buried pipes and cables using a detector.

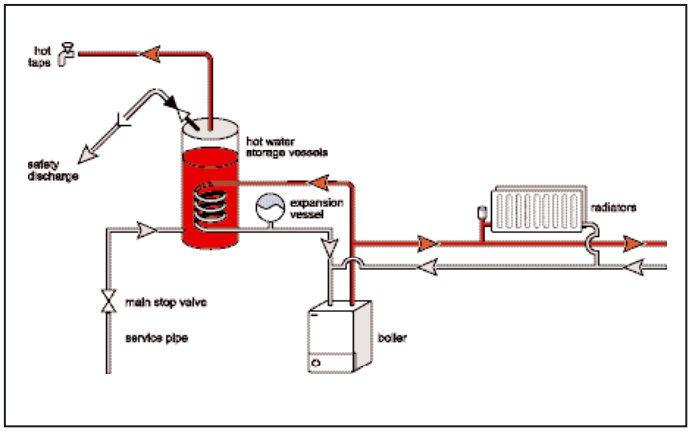
A programmer is provided to turn the heating on and off and you should adjust the settings to suit your own requirements. In cold weather it may be necessary to leave the heating on for longer periods than in mild weather. A room thermostat and/or thermostatic radiator valves are normally provided to regulate room temperatures.

For central heating systems with a hot water cylinder, water

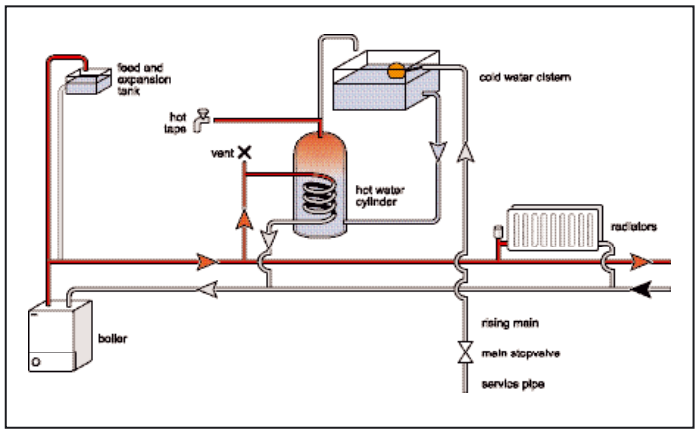
Direct feed system (combination boiler)



Direct feed system (unvented)



Indirect feed system (vented)



heated by the boiler is also circulated through a coil to heat the water in the cylinder. Hot water from the cylinder is then distributed to the hot taps around the home. The temperature of the hot water from the taps is normally set by adjusting the cylinder thermostat.

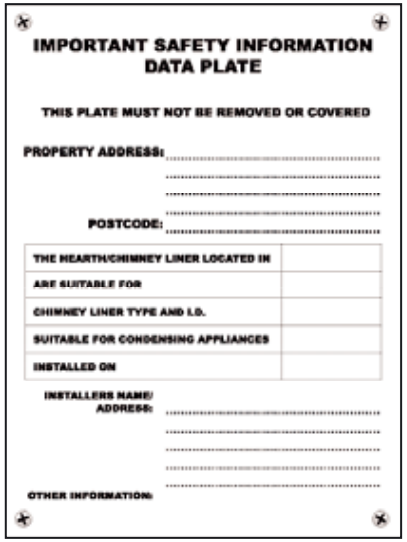
For central heating systems which have a combination boiler, there is no hot water cylinder. Water from the rising main is directly heated in the boiler and distributed to the hot taps around the home. There should be a control on the boiler to set the temperature of the hot water from the taps.

If you notice that radiators are cool at the top it may indicate that there is air in the system which needs bleeding.

Refer to 'Bleeding radiators and re-pressurising your central heating system' in Tips on page 12.

Chimneys and flues

A chimney or flue may have been installed in your home. It is essential that any heating appliance used is appropriate for the type of chimney or flue installed. There should be a notice plate in place giving information on types of appliances that can be safely installed and used. If the builder has installed the appliance it should be suitable for the chimney or flue. If you are going to have an appliance installed, it must be suitable for the type of chimney or flue you have – you should ask the builder or an installer registered with one of the following organisations for advice:


IMPORTANT SAFETY INFORMATION
DATA PLATE

THIS PLATE MUST NOT BE REMOVED OR COVERED

PROPERTY ADDRESS: .....

POSTCODE: .....

THE HEARTH/CHIMNEY LINER LOCATED IN	
ARE SUITABLE FOR	
CHIMNEY LINER TYPE AND I.D.	
SUITABLE FOR CONDENSING APPLIANCES	
INSTALLED ON	

INSTALLERS NAME/ ADDRESS: .....

OTHER INFORMATION:

- CORGI
  (Council of Registered Gas Installers) for gas appliances.
- Oftec
  (Oil Firing Technical Association for the Petroleum Industry) for oil fired appliances.
- HETAS
  (Heating Equipment Testing and Approvals Scheme) for solid fuel appliances.

It is important that appliances are operated in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions.

See Appendix B, Contacts and References.

Fixed flueless gas appliances

Some modern gas heaters (fixed flueless gas appliances) are not connected to a chimney or flue. It is important that these are operated in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. They are not suitable as the principal heat source.

See Appendix B, Contacts and References.

Where ventilators are provided (usually in the wall or floor) they should not be covered over. They supply air to ensure appliances work properly. Covering them could cause a build up of dangerous gases.

Lighting

Your home may be fitted with some light fittings that can only accept energy efficient lamps. It is sensible to find out the type of lamps needed and keep some spares.

Section 6 : Tips

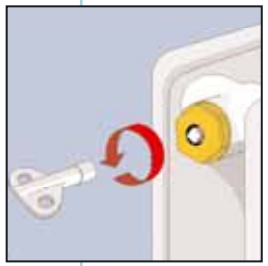
Instructions and manuals

The builder should have given you instructions and manuals for the operation and maintenance of the various fittings and appliances in your home.

Read these carefully and keep them safely for future reference.

Connecting appliances

Be careful if you are connecting kitchen appliances to the water supply and drainage. Check that hoses are properly connected and tightened before turning the water on. It is a good idea to re-check the connections once the appliances have been in use for a day or two – dripping connections can cause serious damage.



Bleeding radiators

If you notice that a radiator is cool at the top this may indicate that there is air in the system. This is common, particularly in systems that have been newly commissioned.

To release the air, first turn off the heating and allow the system to cool. Attach the radiator key to the bleed valve and turn it anti-clockwise. Open the valve with care – it can come out completely. Open it just enough to hear the hiss of the air escaping. Hold a cloth under the bleed valve to catch the water when the last of the air is released. When water comes out, close the bleed valve. If you have not been given a radiator key by the builder they are available from DIY or hardware stores.

In the case of sealed heating systems, it may be necessary to re-pressurise the system after bleeding a radiator.

Re-pressurising a sealed central heating system

Some central heating systems have a small header tank, usually located in the loft space. These systems do not require re-pressurising. Other systems are 'sealed' – they don't have a header tank but do have a pressure vessel, either inside the boiler or close to it. There will also be a pressure gauge, normally on or close to the boiler.

If the pressure gauge indicates that the pressure of the system has dropped, it is necessary for the system to be re-pressurised. The instructions for the boiler should indicate the correct pressure for the system and give instructions on how to re-pressurise it.

A filling loop is normally provided close to the boiler for this purpose. To re-pressurise the system, attach the filling loop between the valves on the heating system and the mains water valve. Gently open the mains water valve, carefully watching the needle on the pressure gauge. Leave the mains water valve in the open position until the correct pressure is registered on the gauge. If you over-pressurise the system, excess pressure can be relieved using the pressure relief valve. Once you have finished, remove the filling loop.

Alterations and extensions to your home

Structural alterations and extensions

Seek advice from a professional structural engineer, building surveyor or architect if you are planning alterations that may affect the structure of your home or the sound proofing of separating walls and floors. This includes adding any additional thermal insulation to the external walls.

Any alterations or extensions to your home will not be covered by Buildmark (see page 3). Neither will any damage to your home caused by the work undertaken.

A guidance note on alterations and extensions is available from NHBC Customer Services on 0845 845 6422, quoting reference HB1780.

Electrical

Work should be carried out by a professional electrician. The National Inspection Council for Electrical Installation Contracting (NICEIC) and the Electrical Contractors' Association (ECA) keep a register of approved firms.

Gas

Work on the gas installation in your home should only be undertaken by a CORGI (Council of Registered Gas Installers) registered installer.

Your loft space

- **Structure**

  All roof timbers are necessary for the support of the roof and should not be cut or removed.

- **Storage**

  Lofts are not generally intended to be used as a storage space; the structure of the roof is not likely to have been designed to take the additional load of stored items and the loft insulation may prevent safe access.

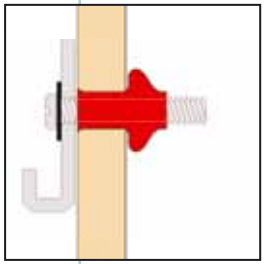
- **Ventilation**

  Ventilation is provided to control condensation. If vents have been provided in the eaves they should not be blocked or covered over.

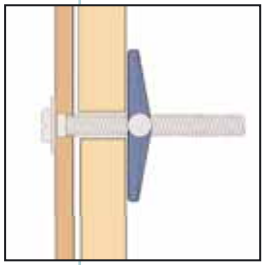
Overflows and warning pipes

If you notice water dripping or flowing from an overflow or warning pipe, you should identify the cause without delay. It may indicate that a float-operated valve on a storage cistern or wc cistern, or that an unvented hot water storage system, needs attention.

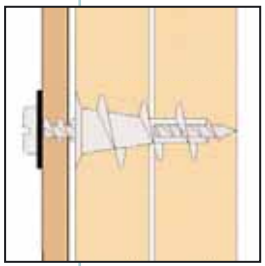
Expanding plug



Cavity toggle



Self-drill fixing



Section 7 : DIY

Wall fixings

The type of fixing you should use to attach items to walls depends on the construction of the wall and the weight of the item. Pictures and other light items can be hung on all types of walls using steel picture hooks or masonry nails.

- **Masonry (blockwork) walls**
  Heavier items can be fixed using wall plugs and screws. You should ensure that the wall plug and screw penetrate through the plaster or plasterboard, well into the blockwork.
- **Timber frame walls**
  For heavy items such as wall cabinets or bookshelves you should find the position of the timber frame behind the plasterboard and screw into that. The vertical timber studs are normally located at 600mm (2ft) centres and can be located using a detector. If studs are not in a suitable position it may be necessary to spread the load by screwing a piece of wood between two studs and fixing onto that.

  If there is no stud where you particularly want a fixing, and the fixing is to carry a relatively light load, then you can fix to the plasterboard using a suitable plasterboard fixing device.
- **Proprietary partitions**
  Certain plasterboard fixing devices are also suitable for fixing relatively light loads to proprietary partitions. Some types of proprietary partition may not be suitable for fixing heavy items to.

Before fixing to walls always check for buried pipes and cables using a detector.

Floor fixings

- **Boarded floors**
  You can use ordinary woodscrews to fix into a floor that is boarded. You should make sure that the screw does not penetrate through the underside of the board to avoid damaging pipes or cables located in the floor.

- **Concrete or screeded floors**
  You can fix into concrete or screeded floors using wall plugs and screws.
- **Separating ('party') floors**
  Floors used to separate flats and maisonettes reduce the passage of sound and may be designed so that the top layer 'floats'. It is essential that any fixings do not prevent this by connecting the floating layer to the structural floor.

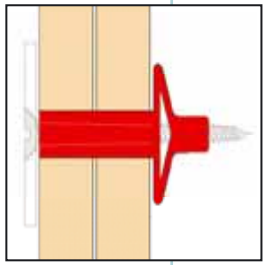
Before fixing to floors or ceilings always check for buried pipes and cables using a detector.

Decorating

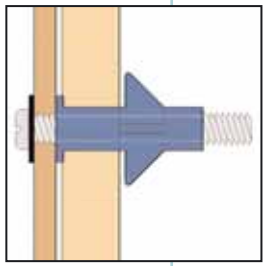
- **Walls**
  The builder will probably have painted the walls with emulsion paint. Further coats of emulsion and oil-based paints or wallpaper can be used for later redecoration, once the walls have dried out (this normally takes nine to twelve months). When you redecorate, use decorator's filler to make good any minor gaps and plaster cracks, which have arisen from normal drying-out and shrinkage.

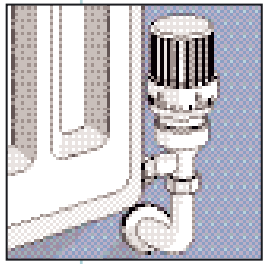
  If, later on, you want to remove wallpaper from a wall with a plasterboard finish, avoid scraping too vigorously, otherwise the surface may be damaged.
- **Ceilings**
  When you redecorate ceilings, Artex and other similar plastic compound finishes should never be sanded or washed. They can be lightly brushed before painting with one or two coats of emulsion. Never apply water to these ceilings until after this has been done. The texture may be spoilt if you do.
- **Woodwork**
  New woodwork absorbs a lot of paint or stain and so the first painting of a home may not give as good a finish as later repainting. The surface should be cleaned and prepared properly and be completely dry before repainting.

Rivet anchor/toggle



Steel cavity fixing





Section 8 : Maintenance

Smoke alarms

The smoke alarms fitted in your home should be mains operated. You should check smoke alarms once a week by pressing the test button. Smoke alarms should be kept clean by the occasional use of a vacuum cleaner.

Heating systems

Central heating boilers should be checked and serviced at least once a year by a competent maintenance engineer so that they remain safe.

Engineers should be registered with the following organisations, as appropriate for the type of appliance:

- CORGI
  (Council of Registered Gas Installers) for gas appliances.
- OFTEC
  (Oil Firing Technical Association for the Petroleum Industry) for oil fired appliances.
- HETAS
  (Heating Equipment Testing and Approvals Scheme) for solid fuel appliances.

See Appendix B, Contacts and References.

Unvented hot water storage systems

These systems should be serviced at least once a year by a competent installer in accordance with the manufacturer's recommendations. The manufacturer should be able to provide details of a competent installer.

Never attempt to service or alter an unvented system yourself. An explosion could result.

Chimneys

Chimneys should be swept at least once a year (unless the notice plate suggests alternative maintenance arrangements) to prevent chimney fires and the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning.

See Appendix B, Contacts and References.

Gutters

Gutters should be cleaned out at least once a year to remove leaves and debris. Wet patches on the walls below may indicate that gutters or downpipes are blocked.

Paintwork

Outside woodwork should be regularly repainted or re-stained to preserve the wood. The first repainting outside will probably be needed in about two years, but, after that – provided it is properly done – repainting or staining should only be necessary every four to five years. You may need to do it more often if you live by the sea or in an exposed area.

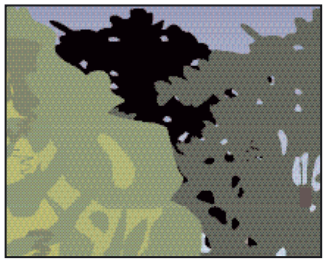
Section 9 : Looking after the outside of your home

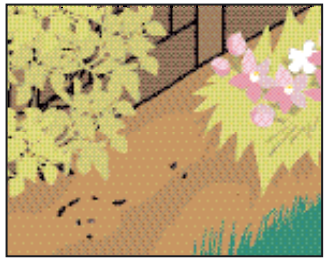
Damp-proof courses, air bricks and other ventilators

The level of soil around your home should be kept around 150mm or two brick courses below the damp proof course. Paths should also generally be kept around 150mm or two brick courses below the damp-proof course, except where these have been designed to provide level access into the home.

If you are not sure where the damp-proof course is, ask the builder to show you.

Where air bricks, permanent ventilators or perpend vents are provided, they should not be blocked or covered by soil or paving.





Drainage access

Inspection chambers and rodding eyes are there to provide access to the drainage system below ground so that blockages can be cleared. It is important that these are not covered over by soil, turf or paving.

Trees and shrubs

Planting trees and shrubs can make your garden more attractive – but be careful.

Trees and shrubs take moisture from the soil. If the soil is clay, new planting may cause it to shrink, while removing existing trees and shrubs may make it swell. Excessive shrinkage or swelling could damage foundations. Much depends on the type, size and location of the trees and shrubs and the type of clay. You should obtain advice from an expert before planting new trees and shrubs or if a large tree dies or has to be severely pruned.

On clay soils it is best to avoid planting trees nearer to your home than a distance equal to three-quarters of the mature height of the tree. However high water demand trees should be planted no closer to the home than one and-a-quarter times the mature height. High water demand trees include elm, eucalyptus, oak, poplar, willow and some common cypress species.

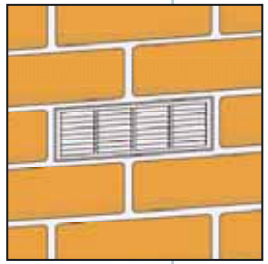
On clay soils it is best to avoid planting shrubs such as cotoneaster, ivy, virginia creeper and wisteria closer than 3m to your home.

On all soils, allow enough room for trunks and large roots to grow safely and be particularly careful if you are planting near walls or drains.

Be careful not to plant trees near your neighbour's home. They could cause damage and you could be liable for the cost of repair.

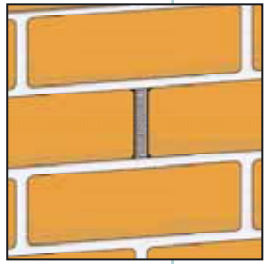
Before cutting down or pruning a mature tree, check with your local authority to make sure that it is not protected by Planning Conditions, Conservation Area Restrictions or a Tree Preservation Order.

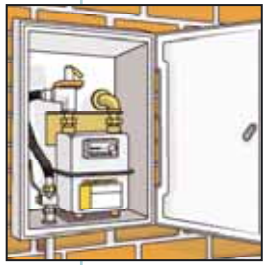
Air brick



Permanent ventilator

Perpend vent





Section 10 : Safety

Fire safety

You should check the operation of smoke alarms on a weekly basis by pressing the test button.

It is advisable for you to consider how you would escape from your home in the event of a fire. You should consider where any keys necessary for escape are kept and familiarise yourself with the operation of any windows, which you might need to use for escape.

Your home may be fitted with one or more fire doors. These are heavier than standard internal doors and are fitted with a self-closing device or rising butt hinges. For your own safety you should not remove or disable these or leave doors propped open.

Electricity

Electrical alterations should be carried out by a competent electrician.

Take care to locate cables using a detector to avoid damaging them if you are doing DIY work.

Do not interfere with earth bonding cables connected to pipework, sinks and radiators, etc. They are provided for safety.

If a miniature circuit breaker or residual current device trips repeatedly this may indicate a fault with an appliance or the installation. You should call a competent electrician to investigate the cause of the problem and not keep resetting an MCB or RCD that trips repeatedly. Take particular care when using electrical garden tools and appliances outdoors. Be careful to avoid damage to flexes.

Electricity is dangerous and can kill.

Gas

If you suspect a gas leak:

1. **Extinguish all naked flames.**
2. **Turn off the gas at the meter.**
3. **Open all doors and windows.**
4. **Call the gas company on its emergency number, which is in the phone book under 'GAS'. There is no call-out charge.**
5. **Don't operate electrical switches – on or off. They may make a spark, that could ignite the gas.**

Boiler maintenance, installation of gas fires, etc. and other alterations and repairs to the gas system should only be undertaken by a CORGI (Council of Registered Gas Installers) registered installer.

Flue terminals

Be careful to ensure that flues are not covered over, blocked or modified. They should not be enclosed by extensions such as porches or conservatories.

Combustion ventilation

In rooms containing a chimney or flue or certain gas, oil or solid fuel appliances there may be permanent ventilators. Where ventilators are provided (usually in the wall or floor) they should not be covered over. They provide air to ensure appliances work properly. Covering them could cause a build up of dangerous gases.

Unvented hot water storage system

Unvented hot water storage systems operate under pressure (see page 10).

Never attempt to service, adjust or alter an unvented system yourself. An explosion could result.

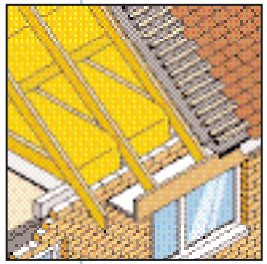
Using ladders

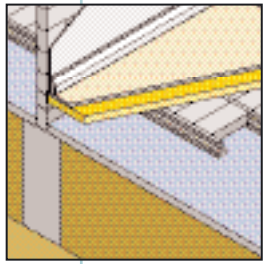
When using ladders it is important that they are tied on to a suitable rigid fixing to prevent them slipping when in use. Always work with one hand holding the ladder, and never lean away from the ladder to reach areas to either side of the work area.

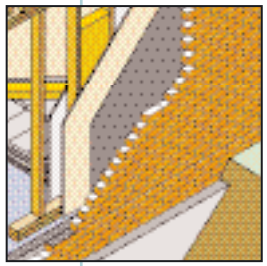
When using a ladder it should be positioned so that for every 1.2 metres (4 feet) the ladder is vertical, the bottom of the ladder should be 0.3 metres (1 foot) away from the wall.

E.g. For an average two storey house, when accessing gutters which would normally be 5 metres (16 feet) above ground level, the base of the ladder should be 1.2 metres (4 feet) away from the wall.

Always move and re-tie the ladder as necessary.

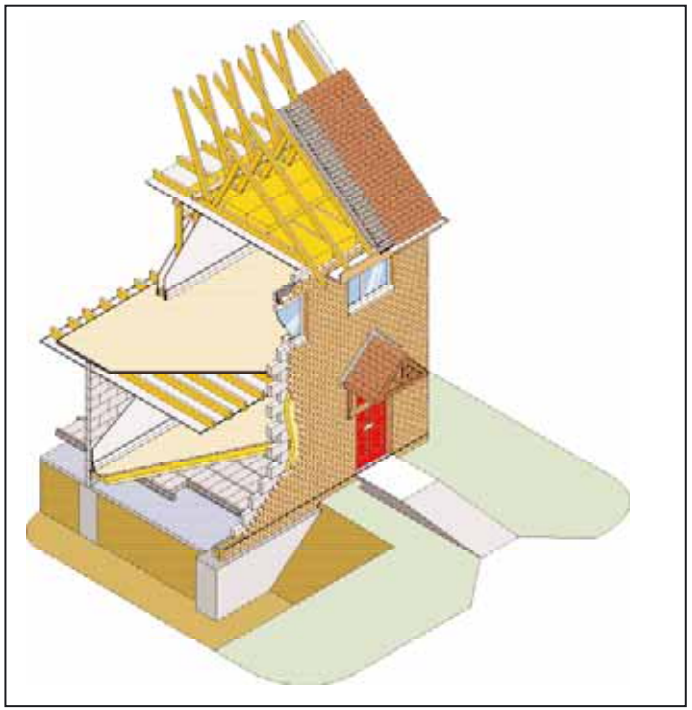




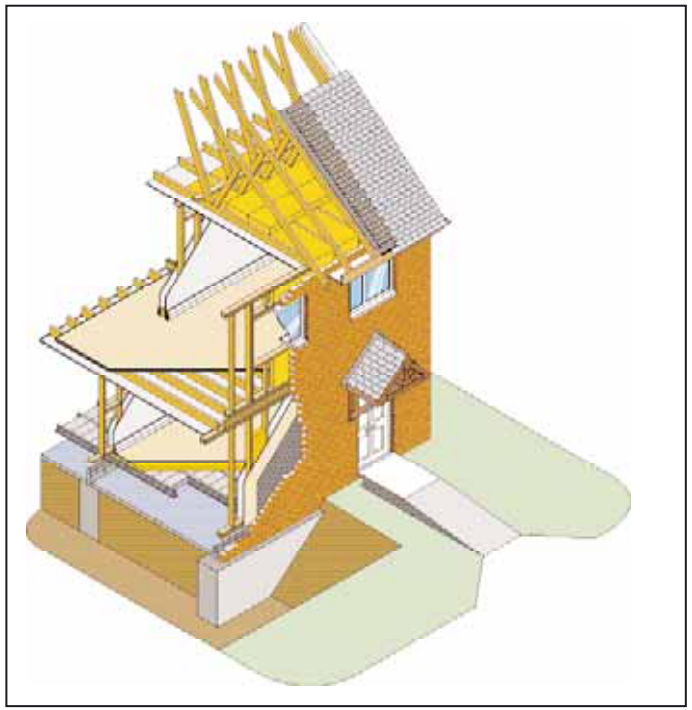


Appendix A : How homes are built

Typical masonry cavity construction



Typical timber frame construction

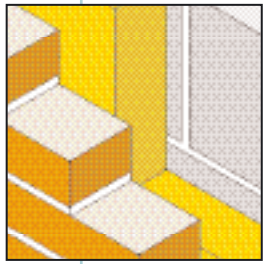


Homes come in all shapes and sizes and are built in a variety of ways. Two of the most common forms of construction for new homes are shown above. Many other forms of modern construction are available for new homes; whilst newly converted homes may be built in a variety of traditional and modern ways.

1 **Masonry cavity construction** – with an inner leaf of blocks to support the roof and floors, and an outer wall of bricks (or blocks finished with cladding or render).

2 **Timber frame construction** – with an internal load-bearing frame of preservative-treated timber and an outer leaf of bricks. Alternatively the timber frame may be clad externally with boarding or tile hanging.

The builder should have provided you with information telling you, among other things, the type of construction used in your home, including the methods of insulation.



Appendix A : How homes are built

Walls

1 **External masonry walls**

Thermal insulation: many new homes have insulation in the cavity of the external walls. The insulation may:

- fully fill the cavity (either as built-in slabs or as an injected material), or
- partially fill the cavity (as boards held against the inner block leaf, leaving an air space behind the outer leaf). The air space behind the outer leaf should not be filled with additional insulation.

  The walls of homes can be thermally insulated in other ways, for example with a layer of insulation provided between the inner leaf and the plasterboard dry lining.

  If your home has an unfilled cavity you should not have cavity fill insulation injected without seeking professional advice and obtaining Building Regulation approval from your local authority, or (in England and Wales) Approved Inspector.

2 **External timber frame walls**

Thermal insulation: timber frame walls are usually insulated within the depth of the load-bearing timber frame, so that any cavity between the frame and the brick outer leaf is kept clear for weather protection and ventilation.

The cavity of a timber frame home should never be filled with additional insulation.

Fire precautions: timber framed homes are designed to the same fire resistance standards as masonry homes.

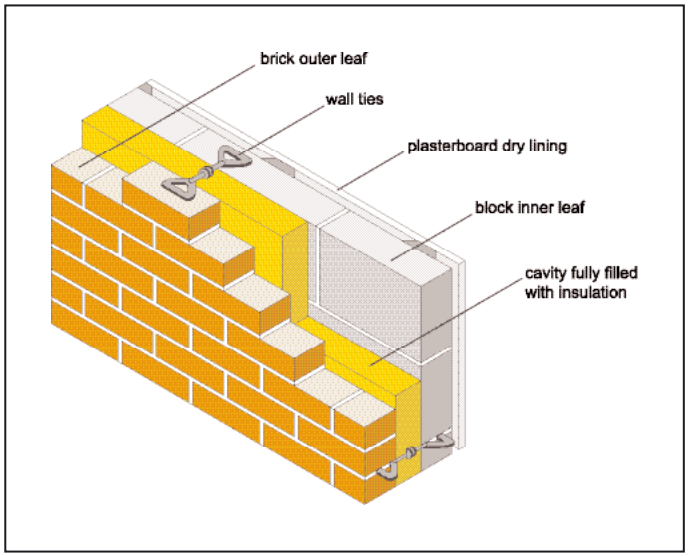
Do not use a blowlamp or other high temperature source of heat in, or close to, any hole in the outer brick leaf or the inner plasterboard lining.

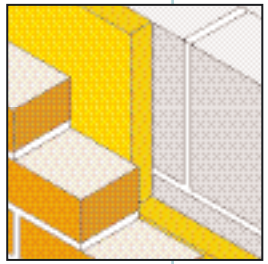
Vapour control: if you cut a hole in the internal plasterboard lining of the external wall, you may puncture the vapour control layer behind the plasterboard. This layer (usually of polythene) may be a separate sheet or be stuck to the back of the plasterboard. It is designed to prevent water vapour from inside the home reaching the timber frame. So, if you do make a hole in it, you should seal it up again with tape, or other suitable material.

3 **Internal walls**

Internal walls can be built of blocks, from timber frames or using proprietary partition panels. Blockwork walls can be finished with plaster or plasterboard dry-lining. Timber framed walls and proprietary partition panels are finished with plasterboard.

Cavity fully filled with insulation





Some internal walls are load-bearing, so do not remove them – or make substantial alterations to them – without getting professional advice.

4 Separating ('party') walls

Walls used to separate semi-detached, terraced houses or flats are designed to reduce the passage of sound and provide a fire barrier.

In masonry construction, separating walls may be built from bricks or blocks with solid or cavity construction and finished with plaster or plasterboard.

In timber framed homes, the separating wall is also timber framed. It may be finished with extra layers of plasterboard and incorporate sound absorbent material.

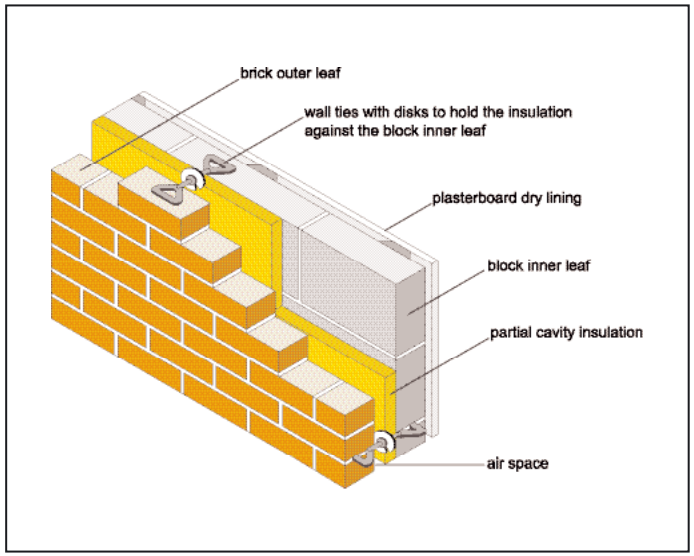
Whichever method is used, you should not reduce the thickness of the wall or make holes in the plasterboard lining, for example, to install an extra power point or recess a bookshelf. This may reduce its sound insulation and fire resistance. In England and Wales work on separating walls may also be subject to the Party Wall etc. Act.

See Appendix B, Contacts and References.

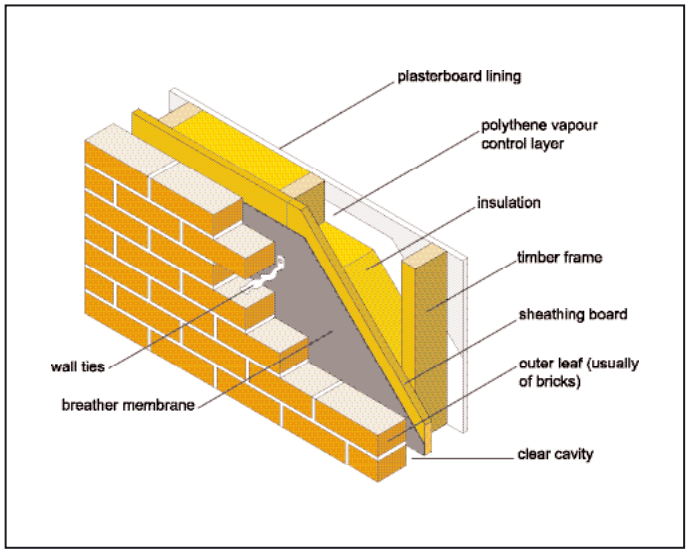
5 Garage walls

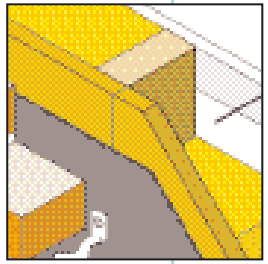
The external walls of garages are often constructed from a single thickness of brickwork. It is important to note that these may not be waterproof in all weather conditions e.g. prolonged driving rain.

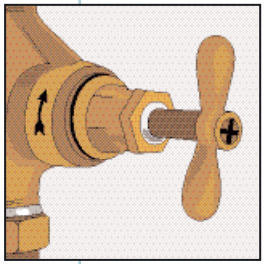
Cavity partially filled with insulation

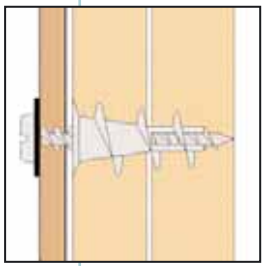


Timber frame external wall construction









Appendix B : Contacts

NHBC Customer Services
Tel: 0845 845 6422 Fax: 01494 735385
email: cssupport@nhbc.co.uk **www.nhbc.co.uk**

NHBC Claims
Tel: 0870 241 4329 Fax: 0870 241 4330
email: claimscc@nhbc.co.uk **www.nhbc.co.uk**

CORGI (The Council of Registered Gas Installers)
1 Elmwood, Chineham Business Park, Crockford Lane, Basingstoke, Hants. RG24 8WG
Tel: 01256 372200 email: enquiries@corgi-gas.com **www.corgi-gas.com**

Electrical Contractors Association
ESCA House, 34 Palace Court, London. W2 4HY
Tel: 020 7313 4800 Fax: 020 7221 7344 email: marketing@eca.co.uk **www.eca.co.uk**

Heating Equipment Testing and Approval Scheme (HETAS)
PO Box 37, Bishops Cleeve, Cheltenham, Glos. GL52 9TB
Tel: 01242 673257 Fax: 01242 673463 **www.hetas.co.uk**

Institution of Structural Engineers (IStructE)
11 Upper Belgrave Street, London. SW1X 8BH
Tel: 020 7235 4535 Fax: 020 7235 4294
email: mail@istructe.org.uk **www.istructe.org.uk**

National Inspection Council for Electrical Installation Contracting (NICEIC)
Vintage House, 37 Albert Embankment, London. SE1 7UJ
Tel: 020 7564 2323 Fax: 020 7564 2370 Technical helpline: 020 7564 2320
email: enquiries@niceic.org.uk **www.niceic.org.uk**

Oil Firing Technical Association (OFTEC)
Foxwood House, Dobb's Lane,
Kesgrave, Ipswich. IP5 2QQ
Tel: 0845 65 85080 Fax: 0845 65 85 081
email: enquiries@oftec.org.uk **www.oftec.org.uk**

Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA)
66 Portland Place, London. W1B 1AD
Tel: 020 7580 5533 Fax: 020 7255 1541 **www.riba.org**

Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS)
Surveyor Court, Westwood Way, Coventry. CV4 8JE
Tel: 0870 333 1600 email: contactrics@rics.org.uk **www.rics.org.uk**

Appendix B : References

A Consistent Approach to Finishes
Contact NHBC Customer Services on 0845 845 6422, quoting reference HB1262

NHBC guidance note on alterations and extensions
Contact NHBC Customer Services on 0845 845 6422, quoting reference HB1780

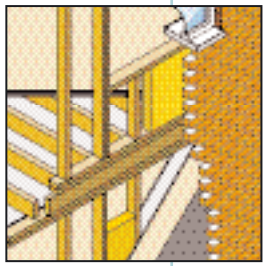
Danger! Fires and heaters need air (ref: URN 95/920)
Department of Trade and Industry (DTI)
Publications Orderline, ADMAIL 528, London. SW1W 8YT
Tel: 020 7215 6024 Fax: 020 7215 0031
www.dti.gov.uk/publications

Building Standards – Your questions answered (for Scotland)
Scottish Executive, Development Department,
Building Standards Division, Victoria Quay, Leith, Edinburgh.
Tel: 0131 244 7442 email: ceu@scotland.gov.uk
www.Scotland.gov.uk

The Party Wall etc. Act 1996: explanatory booklet
Product code: 02BR00862
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM)
Free Literature, PO Box 236, Wetherby, LS23 7NB
Tel: 0870 1226 236 Fax: 0870 1226 237
email: odpm@twoten.press.net

Gas appliances – Get them checked. Keep them safe.
Ref: INDG238(rev2) Health and Safety Executive,
HSE Books PO Box 1999, Sudbury, Suffolk. CO10 2WA
Tel: 01787 881165 Fax: 01787 313995
HSE Gas Safety Advice Line: 0800 300 363
www.hsebooks.co.uk

Solid fuel, wood and oil burning appliances – Get them checked, sweep your chimneys and be safe (product code: 99ASC0638)
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM)
Free Literature PO Box 236, Wetherby. LS23 7NB
Tel: 0870 1226 236 Fax: 0870 1226 237
email: odpm@twoten.press.net



Building Regulations Explanatory Booklet (for England & Wales)
Product code: 02BR00029
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM)
Free Literature, PO Box 236, Wetherby. LS23 7NB
Tel: 0870 1226 236 Fax: 0870 1226 237
email: odpm@twoten.press.net

NHBC
Buildmark House, Chiltern Avenue, Amersham, Bucks HP6 5AP
Tel: 0870 241 4302 **Fax:** 01494 735201 **www.nhbc.co.uk**

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