

Growth in the Short-Term Rental Market Continues to Raise Health & Safety Concerns

An exclusive report by
I-PRAC

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Health and safety concerns continue to rise in the short-term rental industry. This exclusive report explores how a horrifying number of lives are being put at risk due to lack of regulations; and which nationwide (UK) organisations and companies can provide checks and legitimate certificates, to help make the sector safer and more socially responsible.

All sources have been accurately cited and/or referred to.

Written by **Neely Khan**
I-PRAC Senior Research Journalist

A Death Trap for Guests

According to a 2017 survey published in the journal, *Injury Prevention* (as cited on *Time.com*), a number of Airbnb properties fail to adhere to some of the most basic health and safety regulations.

80%

of homes reported having a smoke detector

42%

reported having a fire extinguisher

58%

reported having a carbon monoxide detector

36%

reported having a first aid kit

To raise even more concern, it's likely that these numbers may even be lower, since there was no way to verify that each listing actually contained the amenities that it claimed to have, or that they were in good working order during the time of research.

Travellers wouldn't dream of checking into a hotel that "just might" have a working smoke detector in the room; so it's alarming to find that short-term rental properties fail to operate against the same health and safety standards.

Shockingly, the argument here is that health and safety regulations simply "cease to exist" in the short-term rental industry and many might even claim that it is up to the guests to ensure that they are booking into a safe property.

The screenshot above is taken from the **"Help"** section on the Airbnb website encouraging guests to do their homework before booking into a property. Whilst the importance of carbon monoxide detectors has

Review the safety features

When you book a place on Airbnb, you should review information about whether or not the host has reported smoke and carbon monoxide detectors on the property. You'll find these details on the listing page under **Amenities**.

Carbon monoxide detectors aren't common in many parts of the world, so we suggest purchasing one to bring with you when you travel, especially if the place you're staying in doesn't list one. Here's one example of a portable carbon monoxide detector.

Source: Airbnb website

been briefly mentioned, the company fails to immediately address other health and safety amenities, in the hope that travellers will use their own initiative. Ultimately, without any strict regulations, the likes of Airbnb and their competitors are recommending that guests double-check that they're not putting their lives at risk when planning for a holiday or business trip. Surely, as a sector that's growing at warp speed, the short-term rental industry should be liable for taking more responsibility than this?

In April 2018, the **BBC** released a report claiming how the growth of the short-term rental market has put fire concerns on an all-time high (see report here: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-43718864>).

As we now approach the end of 2019, it's disappointing to see more stories (from across the globe) covering the horrifying experiences of travellers at their short-term rental properties, due to an absolute disregard for basic health and safety.

Case Study #1

Catastrophic Fire at Seabrook Island

A Maryland based family bought a house on Seabrook Island to use for holiday and short-term rental income. In July 2019, the co-owner Anne Arnold received a call from their terrified guests, who through shock and disbelief were shouting,

“Anne! Your house is on fire!”

The cause of the fire was a rented Lightning Bugz LSV cart that was charging next to the property, by a couple (passers-by) with the permission of the rental guests. The guests at the time, thought they were “doing a nice thing”; not knowing that the modified 50-foot extension cord that was being used was not designed for the cart.

This resulted in a catastrophic fire, where the entire end of the Arnold’s home was reported to be “in flames”, causing more than \$50,000 worth of damage and putting the guest’s lives at substantial risk. Miraculously, no physical harm to them had been caused.



What’s frightening is that the owner of Lightning Bugz (where the cart was from), Mark Thorn, admitted to the press that they had been in business for nine years and had more than 5000 weekly rentals.

The Arnolds told **live5news** that they are

“very concerned that the Seabrook Island Property Owners Association rules and regulations recommend such carts are charged in garages or under buildings”.

The genuine shock of the victims of the Seabrook Island fire highlights just how naïve the everyday traveller is, when it comes to property health and safety. Rarely do guests actively look for amenities such as security windows and fire-proof doors when checking into a property (all of which will always be included in a legitimate hotel), nor should they be expected to do so.

What Should Short-Term Rental Properties be Certified with?

A Checklist:

Beyond the cosmetic features and fluffy interiors, there is far more for property owners and rental agencies to consider, when renting out a “spare bedroom”. What many people fail to recognise, is that the basic health and safety standards are the same for short-term rental properties, as they are for hotels. It's important that we publicise this crucial information as widely as possible.

#1 Gas Safety Regulations

Many properties in the UK have a gas supply, whether it is for the central heating or cooking appliances. The associated risks with such appliances include fire, explosion, gas leaks, and carbon monoxide poisoning.

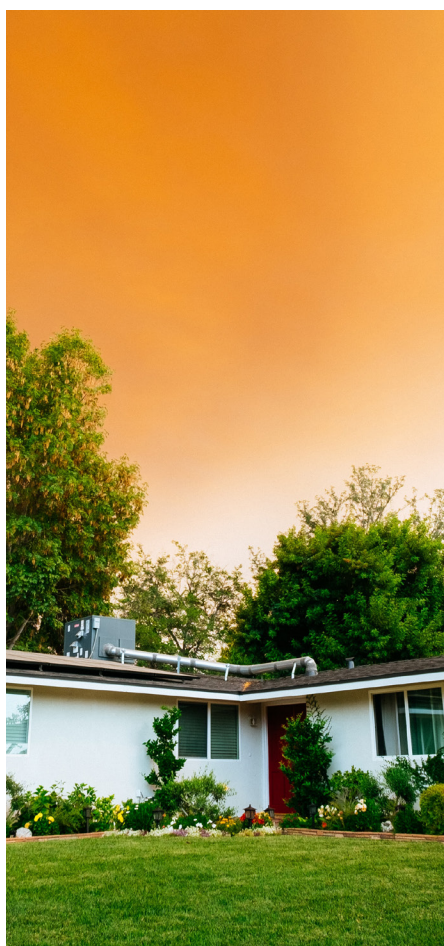
As well as having gas appliances regularly maintained and serviced by a Gas Safe registered engineer, properties are legally obliged to obtain a **Gas Safety Certificate** (also referred to as a CP12).

A Gas Safety Certificate provides details of the latest inspection and covers all items checked during the inspection. This needs to be renewed every 12 months, and it is recommended that property owners keep their certificates for a minimum of 2 years.

The certificate should be displayed in a prominent place where guests will be able to see it, and request a copy if need be.

How to obtain a Gas Safety Certificate?

This can only be issued by a Gas Safe registered engineer, following an inspection. The cost of this



usually depends on the number of gas appliances in the property. For example, an inspection and certificate from **British Gas** starts from £75.

To find a qualified gas engineer, property owners and rental agencies can check the official **Gas Safe Register**.

#2 Electrical Safety

Faulty electrical items can cause serious injuries and even fatalities. Whilst there is no legal requirement in the UK to obtain an **Electrical Safety Certificate**, it is recommended.

Landlords are also required by law to ensure that all electrical appliances, circuits, and fixed installations within the property are safe and not hazardous to guests. A qualified electrician can run a full inspection of all the electrical items in a property for ultimate peace of mind.

It is recommended that **PAT** (portable appliance tests) are carried out on **Class 1** equipment (general IT equipment) every 4 years. Handheld and more frequently used and transported equipment should be tested every 12 months due to an increased risk of damage. In layman's terms, PATs are the examination of electrical appliances and equipment to ensure that they are safe to use.

Since July 2008, it has become a legal requirement in the UK for all circuits in new builds or rewired homes to include an **RCD** (residual current device). An RCD monitors the flow of electricity within a circuit and identifies any loss of current.

As a minimum, properties are required to have RCDs added in areas that are damp, such as kitchens, bathrooms, hot tubs, and pools. They also need to be tested frequently.

How to obtain an Electrical Safety Certificate, PATs, and find out more about RCDs and other electricity regulations?

A (UK) nationwide organisation that can provide further information and all the relevant inspections and certificates for electrical safety is **UK Safety Management**, who look after more than 65,000 sites across the country.

>>> www.uksafetymanagement.co.uk



#3 Fire Safety

It is highly recommended that property owners and rental agencies ask a qualified fire risk consultant to carry out a legitimate fire risk assessment, to ensure the safety of their guests. As previously mentioned, fire damage remains one of the biggest concerns within the short-term rental industry.

A fire risk assessment will identify the source of three things: ignition, fuel, and oxygen, and recommends steps to substantially reduce fire related risks. This usually includes installing a hearth around a fireplace and ensuring furniture is fire-retardant.

Another key area that a fire risk assessment will address is the people who are at risk. Specifics include the “type” of guests here, such as those with disabilities or young children. In the event of a fire, it is **crucial** to outline how these people will evacuate the property and that accessible fire exits and fire doors are in place.

It is a **legal requirement** for rental properties to have a working smoke alarm installed on every floor of the building. For maximum protection, an alarm should be fitted into every room (except bathrooms) and particular attention should be paid to rooms where fires are more likely to take place, such as the kitchen. The “test” button should be used frequently, to ensure that they are in working order.

Whilst the feature of log burners and open fires are highly desirable for guests, what many of them don't realise is that they pose significant risks, as well. Property owners should therefore ensure that their chimneys are swept annually, that they have an adequate hearth, and that a suitable fireguard is available.

How to obtain a Fire Risk Assessment and fire/smoke alarm servicing?

A (UK) nationwide organisation that can provide further information and all the relevant inspections and certificates for fire safety is **UK Safety Management**, who look after more than 65,000 sites across the country.

>>> www.uksafetymanagement.co.uk

What Should Short-Term Rental Properties be Certified with?

A Checklist, cont'ed:

#4

Oil Safety/Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

If a rental property is in a secluded location, it is likely to have an oil supply instead of a gas supply. Failure in oil appliances can lead to carbon monoxide poisoning. Whilst this may seem like something we don't read about often; it was only in December 2018 where a couple lost their lives due to carbon monoxide poisoning at their Airbnb property in Mexico.

With this in mind, it is highly recommended for property owners to obtain an **Oil Safety Certificate** and have all oil appliances inspected by an OFTEC registered technician who can supply an OFTEC CD/12 Oil Installation Check Form.

It is required by law to have all oil-fired appliances and equipment serviced periodically, in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions, this is usually every 12 months.

How to obtain an Oil Safety Certificate and find an OFTEC registered technician?

A qualified OFTEC registered technician can be simply found on the OFTEC website: www.oftec.org.uk

Further information about full oil-servicing and an Oil Safety Certificate can be obtained from The Health and Safety Consultancy (UK) who specialise in working with small to medium sized businesses:

>>> www.healthandsafetyconsultancy.co.uk

#5

Window Restrictors

Often disregarded (or not even thought of) by rental property owners, window restrictors are highly recommended, especially if the property is being rented out to families with young children, or groups of young people (where parties and alcohol is likely to be involved).

Always found in large chain hotels, a window restrictor is a safety device which prevents a window from opening more than a fixed distance. The fixed distance is usually set at 10mm, which is to prevent anybody from getting in and out of the window.

How to obtain and fit safe window restrictors?

Window restrictors can be easily fitted into windows by property owners themselves, as long as they are bought from a legitimate and reliable company.

One of the most reputable window and locksmith companies in the UK is **Safehinge Primera**, who offer a consultancy and quick delivery service, too:

>>> www.safehinge.com

"A couple lost their lives due to carbon monoxide poisoning at their Airbnb property in Mexico"

Case Study #2

Airbnb Rental COLLAPSES Following a 100-People Party

“A teenage girl was physically injured, whilst all the other guests remained in shock.”



Earlier this year (January 2019), a first-floor rental home collapsed during a party, in Richmond.

According to reports (as per **Yahoo News**), more than 100 guests enjoyed the party, causing the floor to give way and horrifically collapse into the basement. A teenage girl was physically injured, whilst all the other guests remained in shock.

Although Airbnb “condemned” the property following the incident, nearby locals claimed that the house had clearly been rented out many times prior to this, and that large parties seemed to be a common occurrence. A lack of clarity on the maximum number of guests allowed into the property was fundamentally putting innocent lives at risk.

Keeping Safe: Renting Legitimate Properties that are I-PRAC Approved

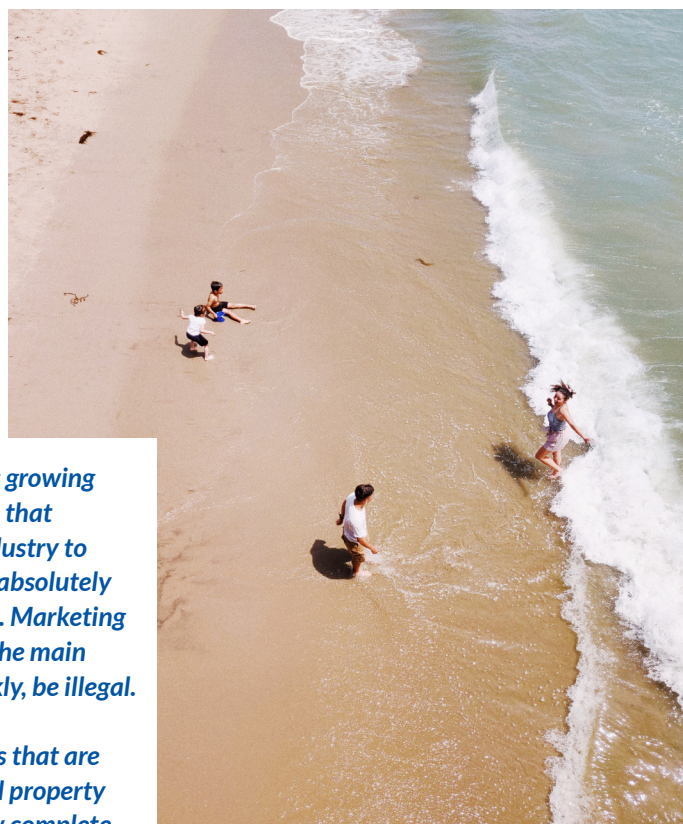
As more devastating guest experiences come to surface, it is without question, a huge necessity to introduce (and correctly execute) health and safety standards and regulations across the short-term rental sector.

The opportunities for further growth and innovation within the short-term rental market are of course, beyond compare. However, sloppy con-artists are sadly continuing to operate in this, meaning guests desperately need a platform they can rely on, that will list legitimate rental properties only.

At **I-PRAC**, we're huge ambassadors of making the short-term rental industry a safer place. CEO and co-founder, **Chris Maughan** says:

"As we can all see, the short-term rental industry is growing at a phenomenal rate. However, what's shocking is that the barrier to entry is frighteningly low. For the industry to continue to expand successfully and ethically, it is absolutely fundamental for tighter regulations to be enforced. Marketing a property without certified approval that covers the main aspects of safety and legitimacy should quite frankly, be illegal."

There are a huge number of high-quality properties that are managed appropriately by legitimate agencies and property owners; however, the increasing number who show complete disregard to health and safety and often post fraudulent listings are harming consumers and tarnishing the industry, as we know it."



Sadly, it is becoming more and more difficult for travellers to rent with confidence, due to the lack of industry standards and regulations. The government needs to take some responsibility here and introduce new laws across booking platforms, as well as heavy fines for those who fail to adhere to the rules. Only then will we be able to stop unsafe properties entering the consumer market and ultimately, stop putting innocent people's lives at risk."

You can find out more about I-PRAC's work and how we provide guests and legitimate property owners and rental agencies with peace of mind at: www.i-prac.com



I-PRAC Head Office

Lower Ground Floor, One George
Yard, **London**, EC3V 9DF, UK

Call (0) 207 125 142

Email info@i-prac.com

www.i-prac.com

Application Centre

Bldg Five Universal Square, Devonshire
St N, **Manchester**, M12 6JH, UK

Call (0) 1613 936 081

Media Centre

Bldg Five Universal Square, Devonshire
St N, **Manchester**, M12 6JH, UK

Call (0) 1613 936 081