

CELLAR SAFETY

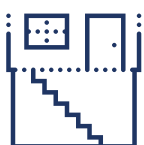
There is no doubt that a cellar can be a valuable attribute to a property with a variety of potential uses.

However, cellars are often not renovated to become habitable rooms and often just become places for storage.

An unrenovated cellar is often dark and quite damp but if you have an older property where utility meters are stored down there, you should be looking at making them safer places to visit as your tenant will need to have access.

When letting a property that contains a cellar currently in use, there are a number of things to consider when it comes to safety. In short, they fall into five main categories:

- Safe access and exit
- Fire risk
- Positioning of utility meters
- Adequate ventilation and lighting
- Damp and mould



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Safe access and exit

Our housing inspectors have come across many cellars that are dangerous to access in terms of an inadequate access point as in the trap-door cellar pictured on this page or more traditional staircases that lack lighting as well as appropriate handrails to current Building Regulations.

Cellars that are in use by tenants should ideally have a landing of 1 SQM separating the cellar door from the top step to reduce the risk of falls. Even if this is not possible due to building design, there should be adequate artificial lighting at both the top and bottom of the staircase. Staircases should ideally be concrete or stone, with no damage to treads or nosing. Wood should be avoided due to the prevalence of damp.



Utility meters

In some older properties, utility meters were placed in the cellar to avoid taking up space on the ground floor. This does open up a variety of potential issues for tenants. For example, if services need to be isolated in an emergency, there is an added danger when accessing a cellar without adequate lighting or staircase handrails. We recommend meters should be moved from cellars unless there is a safe method of accessing them easily.

Fire risk

Cellars should have moisture and fire resistant boarding that give 30 minute fire separation installed on the ceiling to reduce the risk of a fire spreading more quickly throughout the property. This should be plastered and ideally decorated with paint to avoid the development of damp and mould. Any holes where services pass through should be filled to reduce the risk of fire spreading. The cellar should have a working smoke alarm that is audible in the living quarters. Also, be aware that CO₂ and dry powder fire extinguishers should not be used in confined spaces such as cellars as these could impair breathing and make it more difficult to evacuate safely.

Ventilation and lighting

Cellars, by nature of their position in the home, are often subject to damp and consequently mould if they lack adequate ventilation. Timber joists on the cellar ceiling should be inspected for signs of rot as this would have an impact on the integrity of the floor above. Any existing sources of ventilation to the cellar should be maintained, such as external coal shoots in older homes.

Good lighting is equally important (consider the position of lights), improving visibility and reducing trip hazards. LED lighting is a cost-effective and energy-efficient solution to enhance safety further.

Damp and mould

Built in porous brick straight off the earth, very few Victorian cellars are truly 'dry' and many flood regularly. Air bricks in cellars are to be kept clear at all times.

Installing fire rated moisture resistant boarding won't entirely remove the risk of developing damp and mould, but with the aid of good ventilation you will be making what can be a dangerous enclosed space much safer and a more habitable place to be.

When is a cellar too dangerous for DASH Services approval?



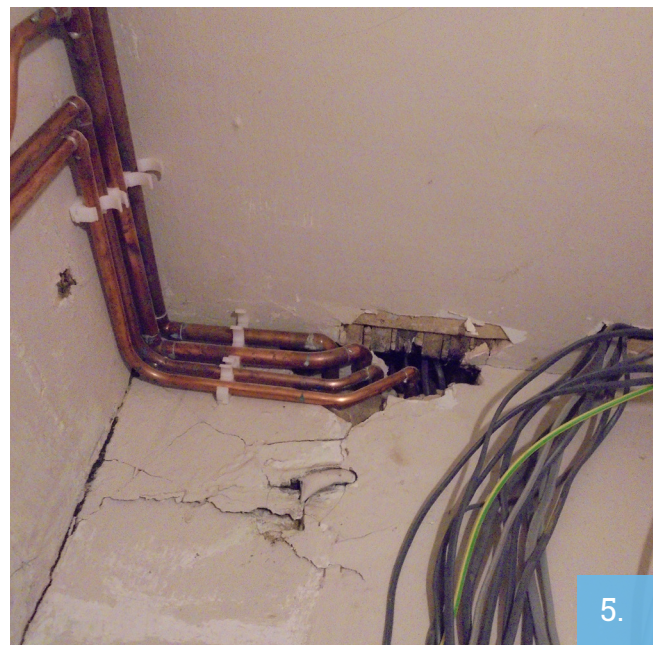
This image shows the lack of a cellar staircase handrail. A proper handrail must be installed along with adequate lighting to current Building Regulations.



It is not acceptable to expect a tenant to access a meter in a cellar to either read or insert pre-payment cards. Meters often provide the only safe location to isolate services in an emergency and must be easily accessible within the property.



Electrical wiring should ideally be properly secured to walls or ceilings. Hanging and trailing cables pose a safety risk. In this image wires are taped to surfaces that become damp, rendering the fixing useless.



Care should be taken not to place exposed electrical wiring close to pipes that may heat up and cause the casing of the cables to melt.

Further resources

DASH Services is a Private Rented Sector service for Local Authorities, Landlords & Tenants and is hosted by Derby City Council on behalf of a number of different Councils across England.

We will always try to ensure that all material on the site is as accurate and valid as we can make it. However, you should note that content is for general information only and we cannot guarantee that the information and advice given will always apply to a specific situation, or that the documents and forms provided will always be the most suitable for your particular situation.

The use you make of the information and services provided on site is your responsibility and we cannot accept liability for any problems resulting from your use of the DASH Services site.

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LACORS Fire Safety Guidance

The LACORS Fire Safety guidance provides valuable advice on all aspects of provisions for fire safety in rented properties. You can download the booklet here:

<https://www.dashservices.org.uk/Resources/>

The Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS)

Falling from stairs etc.

Falls associated with stairs and ramps where the change in level is greater than 300mm. It includes internal stairs or ramps within a property, external steps or ramps associated with the property, access to the property and to shared facilities or means of escape from fire and falls over stairs, ramp or step guarding.

Falling between levels

Falls directly from one level to another where the drop is greater than 300mm. It includes falls from balconies and landings.

Find out more at [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk)

