



## COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

### Householder Interaction with Self-Closing Devices on Doors

### Qualitative Research Report August 2006

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background & Purpose

- Communities and Local Government wish to commission a research exercise to help identify the public's use of and attitudes towards door closers fitted in certain types of domestic properties.
- The Building Regulations apply to building work; primarily, new buildings and material alterations to existing buildings (e.g. extensions, loft conversions) in England and Wales. Separate legislation exists in Scotland and Northern Ireland. Part B of the Regulations deals with fire safety and is supported by guidance in Approved Document B<sup>1</sup> (AD B).
- AD B currently suggests that in certain situations within a house and in most cases within apartments, doors should be fitted with a self-closing device. This is to ensure that the door is kept closed at all times and thus will help to prevent the spread of smoke and fire and keep the means of escape clear.
- However, the Department are aware, from fellow building professionals and other anecdotal evidence, that such devices are regularly removed, disabled or prevented from working effectively (e.g. by propping the door open) because they are considered to hinder occupants in their day-to-day life, and because there may be safety issues, particularly with small children (getting their fingers caught).
- The Department have recently consulted<sup>2</sup> on a proposal to remove the guidance on the provision of such devices within dwellings (except the entrance doors to flats or doors separating a house from an integral/adjoining garage). Instead, the Department would rely on the Community Fire Safety publicity campaigns etc. to promote the message that doors should be kept closed, especially at night. This would have the advantage of being relevant to all properties, not just the 1% of new/altered properties a year that are caught by the Building Regulations, and would also tackle the issue of ongoing use after the building work is completed.
- Whilst there was a good deal of support from consultees for this proposal (for the reasons given above), a number of those who responded objected to removing a safety measure as they felt that most people did not in fact remove such devices and that there was no empirical evidence to support removing the provision. Others felt that as long as some devices were installed there would be some benefit.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.planningportal.gov.uk/approved-documents/partb](http://www.planningportal.gov.uk/approved-documents/partb)

<sup>2</sup> [www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1131416](http://www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1131416)



- The Department, and their Technical Advisory Committee, wish to consider this in the context of better regulation. However, they recognise the issues raised by stakeholders during the consultation process and are concerned that this may be difficult to do without further robust evidence to ensure that such a proposal is fully justified.
- The Department therefore commissioned research to elicit information from householders, so as to provide robust evidence if they were to take this proposal forward or, if the outcome is such, not to take the proposal forward, and thus ensure that the Department's decisions are fully informed and justified.

## 1.2 Research Objectives

Specifically, the following research objectives were identified:

- i. To establish:
  - where such devices were originally fitted to the dwelling, the extent to which these have been removed or disabled in any way (by the current or previous occupants) and the reasons why;
  - where such devices are still fitted, the extent to which they have been prevented from working effectively in any way (e.g. wedged open) and the reasons why.
- ii. To understand which reasons given in (i) above relate to health and safety such as wheelchair access/mobility issues, safety of children, etc., and which relate to convenience issues such as carrying shopping, more light, passage of sound, etc.
- iii. To establish the extent to which people are aware of the purpose of such devices being fitted in the first place and the benefits of keeping doors closed, especially at night.
- iv. To differentiate between those householders who have the chain/overhead arm type closers which pull the door closed across the latch (often quite forcibly) and those who have rising butt hinges which encourage the door to close to the latch.

### 1.3 Method & Sample

- This element of the research<sup>3</sup> adopted a qualitative methodology involving a series of group discussions with householders, structured by:
  - Ø age (25-44, 45-60, 60+)
  - Ø Social Economic Group (SEG) (BC1, C2DE).

- The exact sample structure was:

	Total	South	Midlands	North
BC1, 25-44, mixed sex	2	1	1	-
BC1, 45-60, mixed sex	1	1	-	-
BC1, 60+, mixed sex	1	-	-	1
C2DE, 25-44, mixed sex	1	-	-	1
C2DE, 45-60, mixed sex	2	1	1	-
C2DE, 60+, mixed sex	1	1	-	-
DE, 50+, mixed sex	1	-	1	-
<b>Total groups</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>

- The average number of respondents in each group was 7.
- Respondents lived in the following types of housing:
  - Ø 3 or 3+ storey house built after 1970
  - Ø 2 storey house with a loft conversion (work done after 1970)
  - Ø converted flat (converted since 1970)
  - Ø purpose built flats built after 1970.
- A spread in terms of type of tenure (owner-occupier, private tenant, Council/Housing Association tenant) was obtained.
- In addition to the usual exclusions (marketing/market research, advertising, public relations and journalism), we also excluded from the sample those working in or with close family working in/as:
  - Ø landlords/property developers
  - Ø Local Authority planning offices/departments and Building Control Offices
  - Ø estate agents and/or surveyors
  - Ø the building industry
  - Ø architects
  - Ø any company involved in the manufacture, distribution or sale of door hardware
  - Ø the Emergency Services and Police.

<sup>3</sup> The quantitative survey findings are covered in a separate, accompanying report



- Respondents were recruited using a screening questionnaire (Annex 1). Discussions broadly followed a topic guide (Annex 2) and were tape-recorded for subsequent reference and analysis.
- Fieldwork took place between 11<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> July 2006 in the following locations:
  - South: London (Radlett) and Southampton
  - Midlands: Nottingham and Coventry
  - North: Shipley

## 2. SUMMARY & CONCLUSIONS

### 2.1 Summary

- The findings of this research indicate that interest in door furniture is very limited and largely tended to focus on fittings that could be seen. Hinges were often a secondary issue.
- All respondents in this qualitative research lived in housing types which should have been covered by the current Guidance regarding self closing devices fitted to internal doors.
- However, not all knew if they had self-closing devices fitted to some or all of their internal doors.
- Not surprisingly, awareness was higher amongst those who had had to have self-closing devices fitted to certain doors in order to get major building work such as a loft conversion signed off by Building Control.
- Some who had moved into previously occupied property were more vague as to whether self-closers had been removed before they moved in, or whether self-closing devices had ever been fitted to their internal doors.
- Others were uncertain whether they had self-closing devices fitted to their doors or whether they just had very heavy doors.
- There was fairly widespread prompted recall of the different types of self-closing device. Of the four shown, 'Concealed' and 'Rising Butt' were more readily associated with domestic dwellings than the 'Overhead' and 'Gibraltar' models.
- Interestingly, the 'Rising butt' design was not always thought of as a self-closing device – some had them fitted so that the doors could clear the carpet.
- There was some spontaneous awareness of the purpose of self-closing devices. But this prompted questions about their value and effectiveness, in particular:
  - Ø as most internal doors nowadays were hollow doors, how well would self-closing devices work to hold back a fire
  - Ø could having the door shut actually hinder the smoke alarm from acting as an early warning system by detecting the smoke before the fire took hold.
- Prompted awareness of devices which adapted self-closers was low and largely limited to having seen them in commercial properties/public buildings. The potential cost was seen as unjustifiable for domestic dwellings.



- **There was consensus that self-closing devices could be a nuisance to live with. Moreover, many claimed to be averse to having internal doors shut .**
- **Thus, it was fairly common practice to wedge the doors open more or less permanently. A few took more drastic steps such as removing the chain from a ‘Concealed’ device or even removing the offending door.**
- **A minority of respondents claimed to keep their internal doors shut as a matter of course, and others regularly shut kitchen and living room doors at night before going to bed.**
- **There were also doubts about the suitability of fitting internal doors with self-closing devices for vulnerable groups such as the elderly and the disabled.**
- Awareness of the current Guidance regarding self-closing devices was limited to a small minority. There was widespread uncertainty whether:
  - Ø the Guidance applied to all internal doors
  - Ø this requirement was a Regulation or merely ‘guidance’.
- **In terms of the proposed change with regard to internal doors, this qualitative sample was more or less evenly split on whether or not to remove the Guidance.**
- Arguments in favour of removing the current Guidance included:
  - Ø there was little point in retaining it if people were routinely disabling self-closing devices
  - Ø the widespread presence of smoke alarms in most homes nowadays probably reduced the need for self-closing devices
  - Ø unless doors were proper fire doors, fitting self-closing devices would only have limited impact in holding back a fire.
- Arguments against removing the Guidance were:
  - Ø it does no harm to retain it
  - Ø if it was only guidance, then it should be left to individuals to decide whether or not to follow it
  - Ø retaining it might save a few (more) lives.
- There was some initial low key support for a compromise position of retaining the Guidance for certain doors, e.g. kitchen and living room. However, it was accepted that it might still be no more workable than the current Guidance.
- There was widespread support for the idea of an information campaign about the importance and significance of shutting internal doors, especially at night.
- Such a campaign was seen as fitting neatly into the overall fire safety umbrella.

- It was also argued that making the installation of smoke alarms compulsory in all domestic dwellings would further help to increase fire safety.

## 2.2 Conclusions

- The findings of this research indicate that respondents do not necessarily know if they have self-closing devices fitted to their internal doors, even though they live in the type of housing where they should be fitted under the current Guidance.
- In part, this may be due to self-closers having been removed by a previous occupant.
- Attitudes to self-closing devices tend on the whole to be fairly negative, and many are routinely propping their doors open; and sometimes permanently disabling the device, even removing the door.
- This is compounded by a fairly widespread resistance to shutting internal doors for a variety of reasons, some of which are practical and others fairly subjective/emotional.
- It is worth noting that there is no clear consensus about removing the current Guidance.
- Arguments in favour of removing it revolve around accepting that the current Guidance is observed more in the breach than in the undertaking, and therefore retaining it serves little purpose.
- The case for retaining the Guidance is that it does no harm to leave it and it might save lives.
- Whether or not the Guidance is removed, we suspect there is a case for the development of an information campaign about the significance of shutting doors, especially at night.
- However, it has to be acknowledged that the success of such a campaign would depend on its ability to persuade those who currently do not/will not shut their doors to begin doing so.

### 3. MAIN FINDINGS

#### 3.1 Background Observations on the Sample

- Across the sample, tenure included long term owner occupiers; those renting privately (some of whom were doing this temporarily while looking to buy); and relatively long term Council/Housing Association tenants.
- Some had lived in their current home for a long time (10+ years) while others had only recently moved in (one respondent had moved into a brand new flat six weeks ago).
- Perhaps not surprisingly, most BC1 respondents were owner occupiers, although a few were renting privately.
- C2DE respondents tended to be Council/Housing Association tenants, although one or two were owner occupiers.
- A few had moved in when their home was brand new. However, most were living in older homes.
- In general, those who had had loft conversions tended to have young family, and the extension was a way of gaining more living space. One or two had also undertaken back extensions/garage conversions to carve out more space.
- Whilst most tended to use the loft conversion as an extra bedroom (for themselves or an older child), one or two had turned it into a family/games room.
- In terms of door furniture, most thought of door handles/knobs rather than hinges. Tenants, who could not or had little interest in changing their internal fittings, including doors, tended not to consider door furniture.
- Amongst owner occupiers, especially women, the main consideration seemed to be having attractive handles, etc. One or two had shopped around to find the ‘right’ items. Hinges tended to take second place – as long they were the right colour (e.g. brass handles, brass coloured hinges) few paid much attention to what type of hinge it was. Choice of actual hinge fitted was usually left to their partner or the builder.

*“I chose the handles on some of my doors but not the hinges. I wanted brass to match but I didn’t choose the hinges.”*

*(BC1, 25-44, South)*

- Men tended to go along with their wives'/partners' choice of door furniture. A few more DIY inclined claimed to select 'standard' hinges with pins because they were easier when moving or replacing doors.

*"I have actually got pin hinges so where you have the pin that goes through them, I can knock them out to take the door off rather than having to unscrew the hinges."*

*(BC1, 25-44, South)*

- Across the sample, many were unsure if they had fire doors in their home and, if so, which of their doors were proper fire doors. Those who thought they had fire doors claimed they were:
  - Ø the kitchen door and/or
  - Ø the door to the integral garage and/or
  - Ø the door to the loft conversion.
- Significantly, all but one respondent had smoke alarms fitted in their homes. Those in two or more storey houses said they had a smoke alarm on every floor. In three storey town house where the garage formed the ground floor, they had a smoke alarm fitted outside the internal door to the garage.

*"I have three fire alarms in my house so if I have a fire I will hear it."*

*(C2DE, 60+, South)*

*"We have got a smoke alarm on each level anyway, it is not battery it is mains wired."*

*(BC1, 25-44, South)*

- That having been said, several admitted to disabling their smoke alarm, especially when they were cooking, and not always remembering to put it back in working order soon afterwards.
- Across the sample, there was a range of attitudes to fire safety in the home. At one end were those (younger, without young children) who adopted a fairly laissez faire approach. Some were leaving appliances such as TVs, DVD/video recorders on stand-by all the time.
- Those living in relatively new properties with modern wiring felt they were safe from fires caused by electrical faults.

- At the other end were those who felt they were fairly safe from fire in their own home. They claimed to be taking relevant precautions, e.g.:
  - Ø not smoking/allowing smoking in the home
  - Ø turning off appliances at the plug at night (some claimed to be unplugging appliances like kettles, toasters, TVs, etc.)
  - Ø some had fire extinguishers/fire blankets
  - Ø working out a fire escape plan
  - Ø a minority were also routinely closing some/all doors, especially downstairs, before going to bed.

*“It’s like a habit I have got, when I go to bed I switch the TV off, I just flick the electric thing so it is not on, so it’s off. ... I just turn the kettle off and the toaster because it is the last thing when I go into the kitchen. ... I never use the video to tape anyway, I am not good at stuff like that, I switch it off, I don’t care, I get someone else to tape my programmes.”*

*(C2DE, 25-44, North)*

*“I have had all my electrics checked, I have had all the sockets done and I have had a new fuse box put in ... so that is why I am quite safe unless I leave the gas on or a chip pan on.”*

*(BC1, 60+, North)*

### 3.2 Awareness of Self-Closing Devices

- Although respondents all lived in housing types where self-closing devices should have been fitted, there was considerable initial uncertainty as to whether or not they had them fitted to some, all or any of their internal doors.
- A few spontaneously knew that they had self closers on some of their internal doors. These respondents had either had to fit self-closing devices to doors when they had their loft converted or the door to their integral garage (especially in three storey town houses) was fitted with one.
- One respondent who had had her loft converted recalled the Building Control Officer had stipulated that the door to the loft should be a proper fire door with a self closer fitted. Another claimed that Building Control had insisted she fit self closers to all her internal doors.

*“When we had building regs come in for the loft conversion, you have to have them on because you have to have a safe fire escape route out from the loft. They were quite hot on the loft conversions, so we have got a fire door at the bottom of the stairs going up to the loft which has got one of those on, and we have got one downstairs on our study but I took it off because it is too dangerous for the kids, it just shuts their fingers in the door. Yeah well, you just unclip it ...”*

*(BC1, 25-44, South)*

*“We have a different hinge on our loft conversion door, higher safety ... Somebody comes to check them. They [builders] said to change it round after they have gone, change it back again because you don’t want those doors with those things on.”*

*(C2DE, 25-44, North)*

- In contrast, one respondent in the North had had her loft converted by builder who was a friend and who had informed her that it was not necessary to get Building Control involved.

*“I had my loft conversion done ten years ago. It was a builder that I knew that did it for me and he said we didn’t need building control. It was a friend, actually.”*

*(BC1, 60+, North)*

- Others tended to be somewhat more vague. They acknowledged that some of their internal doors tended to shut unless wedged open, but even so they were unsure whether they were just very heavy doors or fire doors or had self closers fitted.
- Indeed, many claimed not to have given much thought to the hinges on their doors.

*“Well, there is only one kind of hinge. It is not something that you can kind of think about, hinges.”*

*(C2DE, 25-44, North)*

- Amongst most respondents who had moved into previously occupied properties, there was some uncertainty over whether self-closers had been removed by the landlord or a previous occupant, or whether fire doors and/or self closing devices had ever been fitted to their internal doors.
- That having been said, some Council/Housing Association tenants who had moved into new purpose built flats claimed not to have self-closing devices on their internal doors.

*“They must have taken them off because of complaints from tenants or because people wedge their doors open.”*

*(DE, 50+, Midlands)*

- When prompted with visuals, there was fairly widespread recognition of the different models:
  - Ø ‘Concealed’ and ‘Rising Butt’ were associated more with domestic dwellings
  - Ø ‘Overhead’ was almost always associated with commercial properties or external doors in blocks of flats

*“Normally you get them in hotels, it is normally on a fire type door to ensure it has closed.”*

*(BC1, 25-44, South)*

- Ø there was some low key recognition of the ‘Gibraltar’, but it was generally thought to be a rather old-fashioned device.

*“That’s gone, gone with the wind, that one. I’ve never seen one like that.”*

*(BC1, 60+, North)*

- There was some uncertainty about the function of the rising butt – some had had it fitted to enable the door to clear the carpet. Indeed, as it did not always shut the door completely, few readily thought of it as a self closing device.

*“They usually have them where they have got thick pile carpet so it raises above the carpet when you open the door ... and it shuts up snug as it comes down.”*

*(BC1, 60+, North)*

*“One of my doors was making a noise so my mum said oil them, so I went and oiled them. Since then my bedroom door closes on its own and it didn’t used to.”*

*(C2DE, 25-44, North)*

- Overall, the consensus was that the ‘Concealed’ and ‘Rising Butt’ hinges were more suitable for domestic dwellings because they were ‘hidden’ when the door was closed; even if the door was open they were fairly unobtrusive. In contrast, the ‘Overhead’ and the ‘Gibraltar’ were too large, obvious and rather unsightly.



### 3.3 Understanding of Self-Closing Devices

- There was some spontaneous awareness that self-closing devices were to prevent the spread of fire. This was particularly so amongst those with loft conversions who had been told by Building Control Officers that they had to have fire doors and self closers fitted.

*“It gives a person the chance to escape in the event of a fire. If that’s fitted on a fire door that door will take ¾ of an hour to burn through so it’s a special hinge that’s fitted on a special door. That’s to give the people who are in the bedroom on the third floor time to escape. They’ve all got a burn proof time to burn and it gives you a chance. By that time you’ve heard the smoke alarm go off or whatever.”*

*(BC1, 60+, North)*

- The following was used to explain self-closing devices:

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Self-Closing Devices</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Self-closing devices fitted on doors ensure that the door is always kept closed</li><li>• This helps to prevent the spread of smoke and fire into the hallway/stairs and keeps the means of escape clear to allow time for the occupants to escape</li></ul>
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- When the purpose of self closing devices was explained to respondents, there was general agreement about what self-closing devices were **supposed** to do. However, this often prompted some debate about their effectiveness.

*“At the end of the day a fire alarm is much better than a self closing door. You hear a fire alarm, you won’t sense a fire from behind a closed door.”*

*(BC1, 45-60, South)*

- It was often claimed that most internal doors were hollow doors rather than proper fire doors. Thus, even when shut, their ability to hold back fire would be limited whether or not self-closing devices were fitted.
- There was some concern that in holding back a fire, fire doors might also delay the smoke alarm detecting the smoke. As respondents knew that it was the smoke that killed, they argued that it was better in safety terms to make sure that all homes were fitted with smoke alarms.

- There was a widespread sense that an outbreak of fire in the home was worse if it happened at night when the occupants were asleep. Thus, it was important that the smoke alarms should be able to detect smoke sooner rather than later.
- Few were spontaneously aware of devices that adapted self-closers. When prompted, there was some recall of having come across such mechanisms, but usually in a commercial property or public building, such as hotels, hospitals, etc.
- Interest in buying and fitting these mechanisms was limited, especially when told the estimated cost (£1500+ for an average house). This was felt to be a lot of money for what seemed to be a somewhat questionable benefit, and most saw it as an unnecessary and unjustifiable extra expense.

*“A 50p porcelain rabbit is a lot cheaper than £200. ... You can get those strips that go down the doors, plastic strips ... safety devices. They don’t cost £200, I don’t believe.”*

*(BC1, 25-44, South)*

*“Too expensive. You could have a holiday for that money. It is an expense for something that you don’t really think you are going to need.”*

*(C2DE, 25-44, North)*

### 3.4 Experience of/Attitudes towards Self-Closing Devices

- It was almost universally accepted across the groups that self-closing devices were/ could be a nuisance to live with.
- Respondents' complaints about self-closing doors included:
  - Ø struggling with the door when bringing heavy/bulky items such as shopping, vacuum cleaners, trays of food, etc. through from one room to another
  - Ø having to move quickly to avoid being hit
  - Ø having to be extra vigilant to make sure children did not get their fingers trapped.

*"You have to wedge them open if you are doing things in the house and every time you open the door it shuts on you. It is a pain. ... In the heat we have had had recently, I wouldn't want my doors keep shutting. You would have to prop them open.*

*(BC1, 25-44, South)*

- Others, on principle, disliked having doors shut because:
  - Ø it made their home very dark
  - Ø it made them feel claustrophobic
  - Ø in hot weather it made their home very airless.

*"My flat is very claustrophobic anyway so I wouldn't want the doors to shut."*

*(C2DE, 25-44, North)*

*"If I don't leave the doors open there is no natural light in my corridor."*

*(BC1, 45-60, South)*

- Those with children, especially young children, did not like the thought of not being able to see/hear what their children were getting up to.

*"I wouldn't want them to close what with all the kids and that. I like them open. ... I only close the toilet door – when I'm in there! ... It is not something I would think of, last thing at night shut all the doors on every single room. ... I have got young children, I leave the light on and leave their doors open."*

*(C2DE, 25-44, North)*

- There were also anecdotes about accidents/near misses with self-closing doors:
  - Ø children getting their fingers trapped in the door
  - Ø doors shutting on people/pets as they were coming through

- Ø pets being shut in/out of rooms
- Ø elderly people being unable to open the door
- Ø being pushed through into the room by the weight of the closing door.

*“I had a child that lost the top of her finger, the door closed itself and was so heavy that it slammed shut. It was horrendous.”*

*(BC1, 45-60, South)*

*“Our door opens really slowly but shuts really fast and when the dog tries to come through, the door kicks it back out the room again.”*

*(BC1, 25-44, Midlands)*

- Some respondents disliked sleeping with the bedroom door shut, and those with young children left their bedroom door ajar for their children.
- For many respondents the solution was to wedge the door open, more or less permanently using a variety of items including:
  - Ø furniture (chairs, sofas, the kitchen table)
  - Ø ornamental door stops
  - Ø rubber wedges.
- In new properties, the pile on a new carpet sometimes effectively acted as a wedge and helped keep the door open.

*“Mine’s a new house and we have those closers, but the carpet is so thick that it holds the door open anyway and therefore I don’t have any problems with the door closing.”*

*(BC1, 25-44, Midlands)*

- A few took more drastic measures. Some with concealed hinges removed the chain (one did so shortly after the Building Control Officer’s final visit); one or two went further and removed the offending door(s).

*“We had to get them put on to get building regs passed. Then we just unhooked them so the doors just shut normally now.”*

*(BC1, 25-44, South)*

*“I had a load of fire doors in my house but I took them off because they were too heavy and kept shutting. I’ve kept the old ones so that I can put them back when we move.”*

*(C2DE, 60+, South)*

- There was also anecdotal evidence of builders showing householders how to disable the 'Concealed' self-closer. One respondent had recently moved into a brand new town house; the builders had left behind rubber door wedges which she assumed had been left for her to wedge the doors open.
- A minority of respondents were inveterate door closers, and, for them, self closing devices posed few problems. They would wedge the doors open if they were carrying shopping or bulky items through from one room to another, otherwise they were content to leave the door shut.

*"At night before I go to bed I just go round and shut all my doors anyway. I have all the doors open in the day but [at night] when we go around locking up the doors, mainly the front and back door and the conservatory door and then the lounge door I shut."*

*(BC1, 25-44, South)*

*"I tend to when I'm going to bed to go around check the locks and make sure that the windows are shut and I close the doors downstairs before I go upstairs. ... I always close the bedroom door, it's not locked but it's closed, privacy I suppose."*

*(BC1, 60+, North)*

- Others, although reluctant to shut internal doors during the day, would shut the kitchen and living room doors at night before going to bed.

*"Certainly when I go up from the lounge last thing, I shut the door behind me and go upstairs ... I am sure my wife shuts the kitchen door when she comes up. ... I shut the kitchen door because of the cat. I don't want the cat going everywhere. "*

*(BC1, 25-44, South)*

- Significantly, reasons for closing doors at night were not necessarily fire related, and included:
  - Ø habit – "what we've always done"
  - Ø some preferred sleeping with the doors shut
  - Ø keeping pets contained/out of the living room/bedrooms
  - Ø shutting out the noise of teenage/older children coming in late, moving around house
  - Ø privacy
  - Ø etc.

*“We close all our bedroom doors so the cat can’t get in at night just because I don’t want him to get fur everywhere.. ... I close my eldest son’s bedroom door because it is such a tip.”*

*(C2DE, 25-44, North)*

*“I close my doors at night because I like sleeping like that, but in the day I like to have them open to let in light and if I didn’t I would feel all claustrophobic.”*

*(BC1, 25-44, Midlands)*

- Some of those who were not closing doors at night claimed they might start doing so now that they had been made aware of the safety aspect. (However, they did also acknowledge that old habits die hard and this new behaviour may not last very long.)
- Others were more or less certain that they were unlikely to start closing doors at night. Their reasons for keeping their doors open (children, pets, dislike of sleeping in closed rooms, need for light in corridors, etc.) had not changed and still overrode the fire safety dimension.

*“I have got a cat who is claustrophobic anyway. She doesn’t like it if the doors are closed.”*

*(C2DE, 25-44, North)*

*“We leave our doors open so that when I get up in the night to go to the loo I can still see a little from the light in other rooms without turning the main light on and disturbing my wife.”*

*(C2DE, 60+, South)*

- Across the sample respondents questioned how appropriate it was to have self-closing devices fitted to doors in properties occupied by vulnerable groups such as the elderly and the disabled.
- There was some feeling that on a day-to-day basis such occupants would have to wedge their doors open/disable the self-closer in order to move around their home.

*“As you get older you can’t twist and turn and do lots of things so you don’t want to worry about opening doors all the time or them closing on you.”*

*(DE, 50+, Midlands)*



*“I would imagine that the doors that close every time, they would be very awkward for somebody in a wheelchair. They’d have to open a door every time they went through because it would close behind them. They can’t prop the door open so easily if you’re in a wheelchair.”*

*(BC1, 60+, North)*

- If the doors were shut and in the event of a fire, there was some doubt whether vulnerable groups would be able to manage.
- There was some uncertainty whether disabling self-closing devices on internal doors might affect home insurance policies, either by invalidating them or affecting the amount they could claim.

*“If we have a fire and we should have shut certain doors, is that null and voiding our insurance?”*

*(BC1, 25-44, South)*

### 3.5 Response to Proposed Change to Guidance

- Respondents were shown the following stimulus boards to explain the current situation and the proposed change:

1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building Regulations apply to new buildings and major alterations to existing buildings, e.g. extensions and loft conversions</li> <li>• Current Guidance states that a self-closing device should be fitted to doors in:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; houses of 3 or more storeys</li> <li>&gt; 2 storey houses with a loft conversion</li> <li>&gt; most flats</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Government is considering whether to remove this guidance with regard to internal doors in domestic dwellings</li> <li>• Entrance doors to flats and doors separating a house from an integral or adjoining garage will still need to have self-closing devices fitted</li> <li>• Provisions relating to doors in common areas of blocks of flats, within residential care homes, halls of residence, hotels, etc. or non-domestic buildings would not be affected</li> </ul>

- Across the sample, awareness of the current guidance was limited to a small minority:
  - Ø mainly older and BC1
  - Ø those who had been made aware of the current guidance by Building Control Officers
  - Ø tenants who had been told “it’s regulations”.

*“I’ve got a funny feeling that it’s law now that those have got to be fitted if you’re more than two floors. If you live in a three floor house I believe that you’ve got to have them fitted now on the ground floor ... in new houses that are being built.”*

*(BC1, 60+, North)*

*“When I took tenancy of the house it was never explained to me what they were for. I complained about the speed the doors closed and they just said ‘well you’ve got to have the, regulations’.”*

*(BC1, 45-60, South)*

- Many respondents were unsure if the Guidance applied to **all** internal doors; and if so, why.

*“I can understand on specific doors but not on every door. I don’t see the point on having it on bedroom doors and things like that.”*

*(BC1, 25-44, South)*



- Similarly, they were unclear whether this requirement was a Regulation, i.e. compulsory, or ‘guidance’, i.e. preferable to have, but optional.
- Those who had been told by Building Control officers that they had to fit fire doors/self-closing devices were under the impression that it was compulsory, but felt it was unlikely that anyone would check up on them after the building works had been signed off.
- ‘New buildings’ was often taken rather literally to mean ‘new build’. Thus those living in older properties felt the Guidance would not have applied to them.
- In terms of the proposed change, the sample was more or less evenly split on whether or not to remove the current Guidance. Significantly, opinion was often divided within individual groups.

*“I say remove it, certainly in like the general home. ... Couldn’t care less ... It doesn’t seem like anybody is adhering to it and nobody knows about it. It seems as though people do it get through building regs and then do their own thing anyway.”*

*“If they got rid of it in new builds you could get some dodgy builder who doesn’t do a good job then there would be maybe more chance of fires. No, if they are building new builds then if they’re going to have legislation for new builds, fine.”*

*(BC1, 25-44, South)*

- Across the sample, a sizeable minority felt that if people were routinely disabling self-closing devices fitted on all or most internal doors, then there was little point in retaining the Guidance.
- Given that nowadays most homes and rented property, and all new build properties were fitted with smoke alarms, having self-closing devices installed on internal doors as well was perhaps a touch redundant.

*“Every new build has to have a smoke alarm by law so they don’t need the self-closing doors as well because the smoke alarm will tell you.”*

*(BC1, 25-44, South)*

- Some also questioned how effective hollow internal doors would be in holding back a fire, even if fitted with a self-closing device.
- On the other hand, a slightly larger segment felt that if the current Guidance helped to save lives then it should be retained, but backed up with/reinforced by a public information campaign to raise awareness of the purpose and benefits of self-closing devices.

- It would then be down to the individual to decide whether or not and how far to follow the guidance.

*“So what is the harm in keeping it other than it costs people money to do it. But surely it is for everybody’s good isn’t it, so keep it. If people choose not to adhere to them then that is their problem.”*

*(C2DE, 25-44, North)*

*“I suppose these regulations are a good thing because they are designed to save your life. Whether you take any notice of them is up to you.”*

*(BC1, 25-44, Midlands)*

- In the middle was a small group of the ‘Undecided’. Whilst they could see the benefits of self-closing devices, they felt that unless the requirement could be effectively enforced or ‘policed’ getting people to comply would be an uphill struggle, especially as it was generally acknowledged that self-closing devices could be a nuisance.

*“I don’t think it is a clear cut case. I mean, I would be happy to do away with it, but there is 20% that haven’t got smoke alarms and there is probably another 20% that have got original wiring and live in an old house or whatever, you start adding that up and there is probably still the potential that there is a lot of people out there that need a lot more information and advice and things like that.”*

*(BC1, 25-44, South)*

- There were some anecdotal references to the fact that regulations/guidance were being flouted in small hotels/bed and breakfasts.

*“My in-laws run a B&B, they know when the people are going to come round, they never do a spot check. Now their fire doors are permanently rammed open, and my father-in-law has got cling film on his fire alarms above the kitchen. The week before the fire inspector comes around he quickly takes it all off, shuts all the doors.”*

*(BC1, 25-44, South)*

- One or two thought the proposed change was something of a non-issue. And a more cynical and disaffected minority saw the proposal to remove the Guidance as the Government seeking to save money (for themselves/big construction companies) to the possible detriment of the general public.

*"I can't see the real clamour to get rid of it. It is not quite up there with 'name your local rapist', is it?"*

*(BC1, 25-44, South)*

*"Are they trying to save money? They usually are. Yeah, they are because the fire brigade is not having to come out."*

*(C2DE, 25-44, North)*

*"Are they trying the change [the Guidance] to shift the responsibility for fire safety on to the home owner?"*

*(C2DE, 45-60, Midlands)*

- A small number of respondents had had house fires. Whilst the experience had made them somewhat more fire conscious and aware of the damage caused by smoke, overall most were in favour of removing the current Guidance.
- They felt that if they shut internal doors fitted with self-closing devices this might delay the smoke alarms from detecting the smoke and/or hinder their escape. Rather, they favoured making installation of smoke alarms compulsory.
- There was some initial low key support for a compromise position of retaining the Guidance for certain doors, e.g. kitchen and living room. These rooms were seen as potential starting points for fires and thus it was important these doors should be shut, especially at night.
- However, on further consideration, it was felt that:
  - Ø homeowners were likely to wedge these doors open during the day anyway for various reasons
  - Ø this compromise would still need to overcome people's reasons/resistances to shutting doors at night.

*"Now I know what they are for I feel a built guilty about removing them, but to be honest I'm still going to wedge them open. ... Even though we have had this discussion, I'm not going to go home and worry about closing my doors or anything."*

*(BC1, 25-44, Midlands)*

### 3.5.1 The Case For and Against the Proposed Change

- The following (not in any ranked order) were given as reasons for and against removing the current guidance:

#### *For Removing...*

- Very few people are observing Guidance
- Didn't know Guidance existed
- Self-closing devices are a nuisance to live with
- Not going to shut internal doors so what's the point of having self-closers fitted
- Installation of smoke alarms probably removes need for self-closing devices
- In the event of a fire, easier to get out if doors not fitted with self-closers
- The elderly and disabled might struggle with doors fitted with self-closers in the event of a fire, especially at night
- Most internal doors nowadays are hollow doors and thus offer little in the way of holding back a fire
- Smoke is what kills rather than fire, so emphasis should be on smoke detection rather than delaying spread of fire
- Guidance is going to be hard to enforce/ police, so what's the point of keeping it
- Leave it to individuals to decide for themselves

#### *Against Removing...*

- "If it ain't broke don't fix it"
- Leave it to individuals to decide for themselves
- Might save more lives

*"Surely it can't be working or they wouldn't even be thinking of getting rid of it."*

*(BC1, 25-44, South)*

*"[Change it] It is a waste of paper at the moment because no one takes notice of it anyway. ... If people are concerned about fire measure, they should go and buy it themselves, the individual should decide what they want most, safety or practicality."*

*(DE, 50+, Midlands)*



*"I agree with the change because I don't think that there is any necessity to have every door in my house closed."*

*"There is obviously a reason why they had that regulation there in the first place so why do they want to remove it if it's supposed to be in our best interest?"*

*(BC1, 45-60, South)*

*"It's down to personal choice isn't it. It's your own home when all's said and done. You can't have the government dictating to you about your doors."*

*(C2DE, 25-44, North)*

### 3.6 How to Get the Fire Safety Message Across

- There was fairly widespread acknowledgement that people needed to be informed about good practice with regard to fire safety.

*“If they are going to change the regulations they have to make sure people are safe in another way.”*

*(BC1, 45-60, South)*

- There was often spontaneous recall of fire safety campaigns:
  - Ø smoke alarms
  - Ø escape plan
  - Ø smoking safety
  - Ø chip pan fires.
- It was felt that a campaign informing people about the significance and importance of shutting doors, especially at night would fit into the overall fire safety umbrella.

*“Shutting the doors at night ... and check you put everything out and turn your fire out. ... No smoking in bed, that is the other one. ... Show the difference between a fire with the door locked and with the door open ... spreading with a door and without a door.”*

*(BC1, 25-44, South)*

*“They should be telling us why closing doors is important.”*

*(BC1, 25-44, Midlands)*

- It was also argued that making the installation of smoke alarms compulsory in all domestic dwellings would further help to increase fire safety.

*“What they should do is make fire alarms compulsory as they will do a lot more than a door.”*

*(C2DE, 60+, South)*



## **ANNEXES**

Annex 1: Screening Questionnaire

Annex 2: Topic Guide

Respondent's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

South 1  
 Midlands 2  
 North 3

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Male 1  
 Female 2

\_\_\_\_\_ Post Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Group Date .....

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Group Time .....

Good morning/afternoon. I am from Andrew Irving Associates and we are conducting some market research in this area about what it's like living in certain types of houses. Could you help us, please? Thank you very much, but first of all can I ask a few questions to make sure that we talk to the right cross-section of people.

Q1. Do you or any members of your immediate family work in/for ...

*READ OUT/SHOW CARD A*

- |  |    |              |
|--|----|--------------|
| Market research or marketing   | 1  |              |
| Advertising  | 2  |              |
| Public Relations or Journalism   | 3  |              |
| Landlords/Property Developers  | 4  |              |
| Local Authority planning offices/departments   | 5  |              |
| Building Control Offices   | 6  |              |
| Estate agents and/or Surveyors   | 7  | <i>Close</i> |
| The Building Industry  | 8  |              |
| Architects   | 9  |              |
| Any company involved in the manufacture,<br>distribution or sale of door hardware, e.g.<br>hinges, fixings, etc. | 10 |              |
| The Emergency Services   | 11 |              |
| The Police   | 12 |              |
| -----  |    |              |
| None of the above  | 13 | <i>Q2</i>    |

Q2. What is the occupation of the main wage earner in your household?

*WRITE IN BELOW AND CODE OPPOSITE*

- |       |   |
|-------|---|
| A     | 1 |
| ----- |   |
| B     | 2 |
| C1    | 3 |
| C2    | 4 |
| D     | 5 |
| E     | 6 |



Q3.	Which of the following age groups do you come into? <i>SHOW CARD B</i>	Under 25 ----- 25-29 30-34 35-39 40-44 45-49 50-54 55-59 60-64 65-69 70-75 Over 75	1  2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12	<i>Close</i>   <i>Check quota then Q4</i>
	<i>Aim to get a spread of ages in each group</i>			

Q4.	And are you ... <i>SHOW CARD C</i>	An owner-occupier A private tenant A Council tenant A Housing Association tenant	1 2 3 4	   <i>See *</i>
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\* *IN EACH GROUP AIM TO GET A SPREAD OF DIFFERENT TYPES OF TENURE.  
IN BC1 GROUPS, IDEALLY AIM TO GET SOME RESPONDENTS CODING 2 (private tenant)  
CHECK QUOTA THEN Q5.*

Q5.	Which of the following best describes the property where you live? <i>SHOW CARD D</i>	3 storey or 3+ storey house built after 1970 ----- 2 storey house with a loft conversion Converted flat ----- Purpose built flats built after 1970 ----- None of the above <i>Close</i>	1  2 3  4  5	       <i>Q7</i>       <i>Q6</i>       <i>Q7</i>
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***Q6: Ask only if respondent coded 2 or 3 at Q5***

Q6.	Was the work carried out ...	Before 1970 After 1970 Don't know	1 2 3	   <i>See *</i>
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\* *IDEALLY, RESPONDENTS SHOULD CODE 2. CHECK QUOTA THEN Q7*

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Q7. Finally, have you taken part in any market research group discussion in the last six months?	Yes	1	Close
	-----		
	No	2	Recruit

---

*If respondent fits quota, send him/her an invitation card confirming date, time and location of the interview. Make sure that respondent's name, address and telephone number, and the date and time of the interview is clearly recorded on the front of the questionnaire so that you can telephone him/her with a reminder to attend.*

*I hereby declare this questionnaire has been completed according to the instructions and the Market Research Society's Code of Conduct, and that the respondent was unknown to me at the time of recruitment.*

RECRUITER'S NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNED: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

## Self-Closing Doors

### Topic Guide

#### 1. Background/Warm up

*Explain purpose of the group and reassure about confidentiality/tape recording etc.*

- Ø Invite respondents to introduce themselves:
  - first name, occupation, family/living circumstances
  - brief description of current home/property type
  - tenure – owner/occupier, tenant
  - length of time in current home

#### 2. Awareness/Experience of Self-Closers

- Ø Are they aware of what kinds of fittings they have on their internal doors
- Ø Can they describe them

*Prompt with visuals*

- Ø Awareness of these – overhead, chain, hinged ...
- Ø Number of internal doors that have these devices fitted and for which rooms
- Ø What is good about them
- Ø What is less good about them

*Encourage respondents to recount their experiences*

- Ø What steps have they taken to overcome the negatives – have they disabled the devices in any way

*If necessary, prompt: doors propped open ® devices unscrewed/discarded*

- Ø Why have they done this
- Ø Is this for all or only some doors fitted with these devices
- Ø If only some doors, which ones and why
- Ø For doors which are propped open, is this the whole time or some of the time – why
- Ø For doors which are permanently disabled – did they do this themselves or was it done by a previous occupant
- Ø Were the devices already fitted when they moved in ...
- Ø ... or were they installed during current occupancy – why were they fitted

#### 3. Understanding of/Attitude to Self-Closers

- Ø Do they know what these devices are for – their role/function

*If necessary, explain purpose of self-closers*

- Ø Does this affect their attitude to self-closers – how and why
- Ø Will this change their behaviour, e.g.:
  - refit self-closers
  - remove door props
  - shut doors at night, etc.
- Ø Why/why not
- Ø Which alternatives more/less appealing – why

- Ø Awareness of products which can 'adapt' door closers, e.g.:
  - **hold open devices** often magnetic, linked to smoke alarms. Door held permanently open but released when smoke alarm goes off
  - **free swing devices** which enable door to be placed in any position (like a 'normal' door). If the door is open it will be powered shut when the smoke alarm goes off*benefits are convenience and the door shuts when the smoke alarm is activated; downside is such devices are comparatively expensive (could be £1500+ for an average house)*
- Ø Interest in purchasing these devices/voluntarily paying for them to be fitted

#### **4. Responses to proposed change in legislation**

*Explain (briefly) current building regulations and proposed changes*

- Ø What do they think of this – positives/negatives and why
- Ø Are there any circumstances where fitting self-closers by regulation is required/desirable, e.g. homes where there are people with disabilities/other vulnerable groups (*get respondents' ideas of who these vulnerable groups might be*)
- Ø Are there certain rooms where fitting self-closers by regulation is required/desirable – why

*note: the proposed changes would only apply to private dwellings and would not affect care homes, halls of residence, etc.*

#### **5. Fire Safety**

- Ø If requirement for self-closers on internal doors is removed, what measures could people take to improve fire safety in the home
- Ø How should these messages be put out

#### **6. Summary**

- Ø Having discussed the issues, what are respondents' overall feelings about:
  - self-closers
  - what the Government should do