

News from the Northern Ireland Executive

March 2009



February

CONSULTATION ON NEW FIRE SAFETY REGULATIONS FOR NON-DOMESTIC PREMISES

On 9 February 2009 the Public Safety Minister Michael McGimpsey launched a three month consultation on proposals to reform fire safety regulations in Northern Ireland. The regulation will give effect to EU Health and Safety directives and will bring Northern Ireland into line with England, Scotland and Wales.

The Minister said "The new regulations will replace the current requirement to have fire certificates for non-domestic premises with risk assessments. Employers, owners, managers and landlords will in future be responsible for ensuring that fire risk assessments are carried out and measures to protect lives are put in place".

The regulations will be accompanied by guidance documents, aimed at providing information and advice for those with duties under the proposed legislation. Encouraging a broad response on the public consultation, Mr McGimpsey added "These regulations and guidance notes will support the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service in promoting fire prevention and fire safety awareness in businesses, schools and homes across Northern Ireland".

The consultation documents are available on the DHSSPS website. Hard copies can be requested by contacting 028 9052 2248, emailing firesafety@dhsspsni.gov.uk or by writing to the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Public Safety Unit, Annexe 4, Castle Buildings, Stormont, Belfast, BT4 3SQ. The consultation runs until 8 May 2009.

MINISTER NOTES 2009/2010 DISTRICT RATES

On 15 February 2009 all individual district councils struck their district rates for the 2009/2010 financial year. District rates vary from district to district, reflecting the rateable resources and spending policies of individual council. This year, the district rates show percentage increases of between 0% and 8.52%, when compared to the 2008/2009 figures.

From 2007/2008 domestic rates have been determined on the basis of capital valuations of property as assessed by the Land and Property Services. The valuation date is fixed as at 1 January 2005. Non domestic rates will continue to be based on rental value.

AGRICULTURAL LAND – TRANSFER OF SINGLE FARM PAYMENT ENTITLEMENTS

Farmers are reminded that the deadline for submitting applications for the transfer of payment entitlements for the 2009 scheme year is 2 April 2009.

The Department of Agricultural and Rural Development (DARD) encourages farmers to submit their transfer applications well in advance of the 2 April 2009 deadline. This allows any queries to be resolved and, if necessary, a revised application to be submitted before the deadline.

Farmers who have inherited payment entitlements should make sure that, as soon as probate has been cleared, the Executor or Personal Representative for the deceased's estate sends DARD a transfer application to transfer the entitlements to the beneficiary.

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The person receiving entitlements must be registered and approved by DARD as a farm business. Farmers who are considering buying or leasing payment entitlements or who have inherited entitlements and are not already approved as a farm business should contact their local DARD office for advice and an application form.

Completed application forms for the transfer of payment entitlements for the 2009 scheme year should be returned to the Single Farm Payment Trading/Entitlements Section, Orchard House, 40 Foyle Street, Londonderry, BT48 6AT.

FARM MAP UPDATE INITIATIVE

An initiative has been launched to provide local farmers with the opportunity to update their farm maps. The scheme will allow farmers to correct their farm maps to ensure they claim only eligible land and help avoid delay in the processing of subsidy claims.

Appointments can be made with a local DARD office between 23 February and 30 March 2009 to review the farm maps. Farmers will be able to view their map on screen along with a aerial photograph. This will help farmers identify features that need to be excluded from field areas. A revised farm map will be issued after any amendments are made on the Department's Geographical Information System.

January

SOCIAL HOUSING

On 28 January 2009 Social Development Minister Margaret Ritchie MLA cut the first sod to launch a new eco-friendly housing scheme in Newtownards which is being piloted as the first social housing scheme to meet Level 4 of the Code for Sustainable Homes. From April 2008, all new social housing has been designed to Level 3 of the Code for Sustainable Homes. At Level 3, CO2 emissions are improved by 25%, whilst Level 4 increases that by a further 19%.

The Code is designed to improve the sustainability of new homes and requires all new social housing to offer a reduced environmental impact, lower running costs and features that enhance health and well being.

NORTHERN IRELAND'S NEW FLOODING INCIDENT LINE

A new telephone number 0300 2000 100 has been announced to make it easier for people to report flooding incidents. The new telephone service will be available 24 hours a day all year round and the incident line operators will route the report to the right flooding response agency.

December

HERITAGE

The largest ever single grant for an historic building was announced by the Environment Minister Sammy Wilson. Church House in Belfast's Fisherwick Place, the headquarters of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, has been awarded a £1million grant from the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) for repairs. It is the single biggest grant award ever given under the Historic Buildings Grant Aid Scheme for repairs to listed buildings.

NIEA Conservation Architect Dermot MacRandal said the Grade A listed building was a significant and distinctive part of Belfast's architectural heritage.

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Changes to the NIEA's Historic Buildings Grant Aid Scheme earlier this year meant that most listed buildings are now eligible to apply, increasing the number of eligible buildings by almost 50%. There are approximately 8,200 listed buildings in Northern Ireland. Anyone who owns a listed building and is increased in applying to the Historic Buildings Grant Aid Scheme should contact the grant section of NIEA: Historic Buildings Unit by telephoning 028 9054 3038.

On a personal note the staff of Cleaver Fulton Rankin would like to congratulate their former Partner, Peter James Rankin on being awarded the Order of the British Empire (OBE) in the New Year Honours List for his voluntary work with the Belfast Buildings Preservation Trust as a Legal Adviser.

ON-LINE FLOOD MAP INFORMATION

For the first time ever, the public has easy access to flood map information for Northern Ireland. Information on areas that may be at risk of flooding from rivers and the sea is available on the internet via the Rivers Agency website.

The Strategic Flood Map, launched by the Agricultural and Rural Development Minister, Michelle Gildernew, MP MLA and Environment Minister Sammy Wilson, MP MLA shows areas that could be affected by flooding from rivers or the sea and gives helpful information on the location of the Rivers Agency flood defence schemes and measures already in place to reduce risk.

The map is designed to increase awareness amongst the general public, local authorities, utilities and other organisations of the likelihood of flooding and to encourage them to be better prepared and take appropriate action.

Environment Minister Sammy Wilson said "The flood map will be a useful tool for planners who have to make key decisions on new building projects. A key objective of my department is to manage the provision of new development necessary to maintain the social and economic well being of Northern Ireland. In delivering that objective we need to take account of a broad range of issues including the potential for flooding".

The maps will support government Departments and Agencies involved in planning and water management and in particular the maps will facilitate and support planning policy PPS 15 Planning and Flood Risk which adopts a precautionary approach to the development and use of land by seeking to avoid inappropriate development in flood risk areas.

The Strategic Flood Map can be accessed via the Rivers Agency website www.riversagency.ni.gov.uk or information packs can be obtained by contacting Rivers Agency on 0845 3044 505.

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