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National Protective  
Security Authority



## Guidance

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# The Preparation and Use of Safer Areas to Protect High-Risk Individuals

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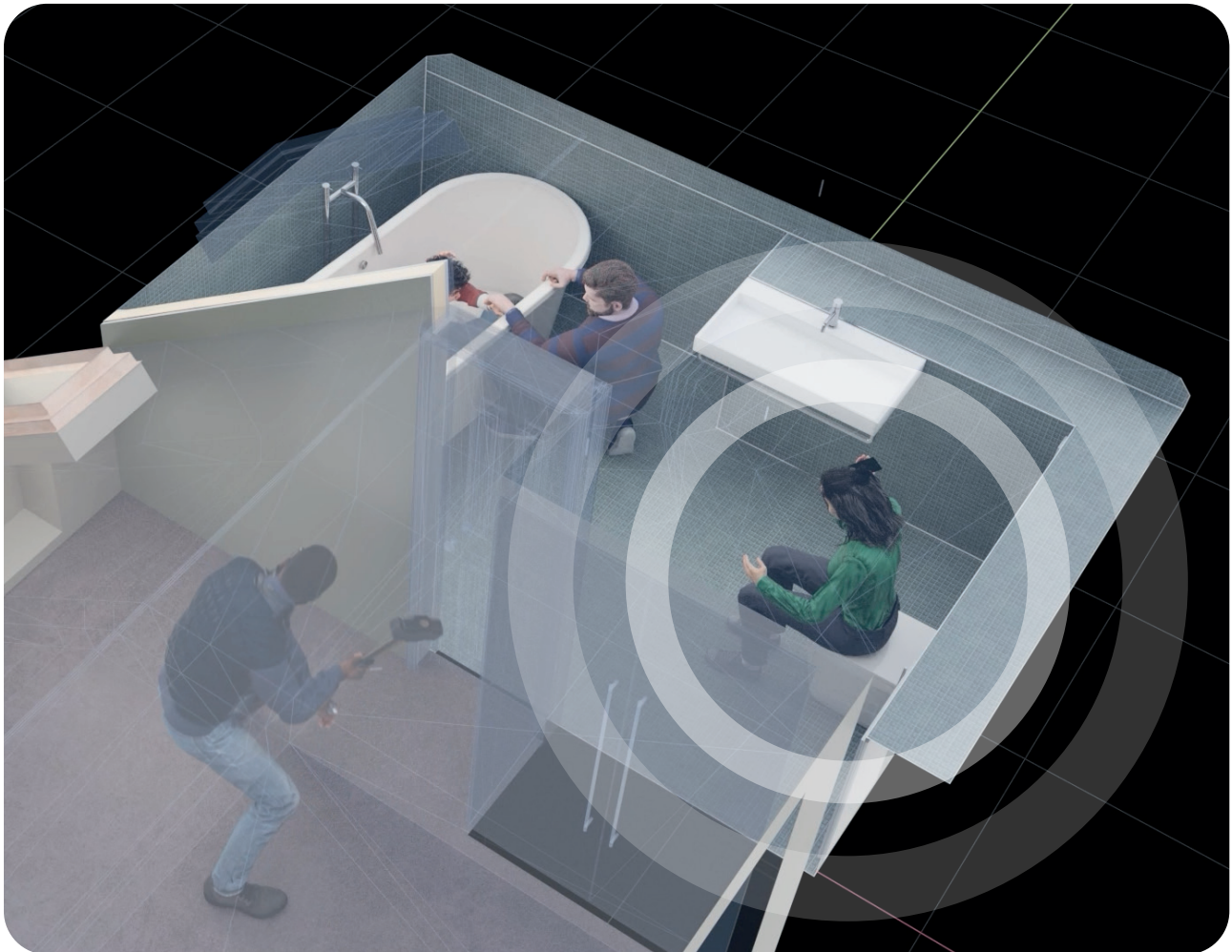
If you are a high-risk individual, you may consider the use of a safer area to protect yourself and those living with you from immediate threats to your personal safety and security.

If you are subjected to an attack, your first objective is to get yourself out of danger. This can be done by either:

- evacuating away from the danger by moving away from it as quickly as possible
- locking down the premises you are in
- invacuating into a safer area within the premises
- a combination of the above.

Action should also be taken to immediately alert those present with you in your home and contact the police.

Each incident is likely to be different and will determine the most appropriate action. Plans should, therefore, be flexible and able to adapt to circumstances as they arise.



The focus of this document is solely on safer areas<sup>1</sup> and how to identify:

- where a safer area should be located
- how a safer area should be designed and equipped
- how a safer area should be used.

The focus of this guidance is on the development of safer areas within residential premises. However, the principles that have been developed may equally be used in the workplace.

Additional guidance is available from the NPSA (see [Protect Your Home](#)) and from [SBD](#) in relation to understanding the risk to you and your family and other important aspects of protecting your home. Consideration should also be given to how to protect yourself if you are away from your normal residential or business premises for an extended period. In some situations, elements of this guidance could be adapted to protect you as you travel away from home.

### What is a safer area?

A safer area is a location within your home that affords you a greater level of protection from physical threats, allowing the opportunity for you to:

- shelter if your home is attacked
- communicate with the police and await their arrival
- activate any security devices (e.g. alarm sounder)
- monitor the threat (e.g. via a home security camera system).

A safer area should be considered as just one layer of security within and around a home. It will only work effectively if the outer layers provide sufficient warning and delay to allow the occupants of a building to retreat to the safer area when responding to a physical threat. Additional guidance on how to improve the protective security



of your home by installing a Home Security System is provided by the NPSA (see [Protect Your Home](#)).

### When should I use a safer area?

Safer areas should be used when there is a potentially violent threat and you decide it would be safer for you to shelter rather than try to escape the danger. This could be when the threat is outside your property or has breached into your home.

When using a safer area, you should constantly re-evaluate what is taking place and decide whether it is safer to remain in or leave the safer area. Your action will depend on the situation you are faced with. The situation is likely to be dynamic and may change without notice. A decision may need to be made to evacuate the safer area at any time.

It's essential to understand the physical limitations of the security provided by your safer area against the threats you may face. Where necessary, assistance to assess the limitations may be obtained from additional NPSA guidance, a Counter Terrorism Security Advisor (CTSA) or a [registered security engineer or specialist](#).

<sup>1</sup> Guidance is available to victims of domestic violence from [SBD](#) in relation to Sanctuary Schemes.

## How big should a safer area be?

The safer area should be large enough to accommodate those who live with you and be designed to offer as much delay as possible until the emergency services arrive.

## Where should the safer area be located?

A safer area can be created within a space in your home that is used for everyday purposes, such as a bathroom, bedroom, or storeroom. It does not need to be a dedicated space.

The location will depend on the type of property you live in. This guidance can be adapted for a flat in a multi-storey building, a flat in a house, or a detached house. When selecting a location, try and accommodate the following:

- Ideally, a safer area should have a secondary means of escape (such as a door or window that is large enough to escape through), although, in many dwellings, this is often not practicable.
- It needs to be easily and quickly accessed by everyone using it.
- If an alternative is available, it should **not** be located on the ground floor or in a basement with an external window. If there are no suitable alternatives, you may need to engage a [registered security engineer or specialist](#) to identify ways in which the vulnerability presented by the window can be reduced. Additional guidance is available from the NPSA on enhancing or replacing doors, walls and windows. This includes how secondary glazing and window grilles can be used to provide additional protection. If they are installed, they must be readily openable.

- Doors, walls and windows on the ground floor (and those on other floors that are readily accessible to attackers) should be designed, constructed or adapted so that they delay access if someone is trying to force their way in.
- A safer area with a smaller wall surface that can be attacked will reduce the area that needs additional protection.
- The door into the safer area should be lockable from the inside and not easily manipulated from the outside. It should not contain a vision panel.
- Where possible the safer area should be easy for the fire service to reach in the event of a fire.

## How should a safer area be protected against forced entry?

The primary requirement is for the occupants to remain out of sight of the attacker and to be protected by doors, windows and walls that are resistant against forced entry. In doing so, the vulnerability to a range of attack types, such as firearms (see firearms attacks below), will be **reduced but not eliminated**. In relation to the protection and mitigation required, you should consider:

### What type of threat do you want to mitigate against?

You will want to prevent an attacker from forcing their way into the room, but you may also need to reduce the vulnerability from the use of weapons and ammunition (see firearms attacks below).

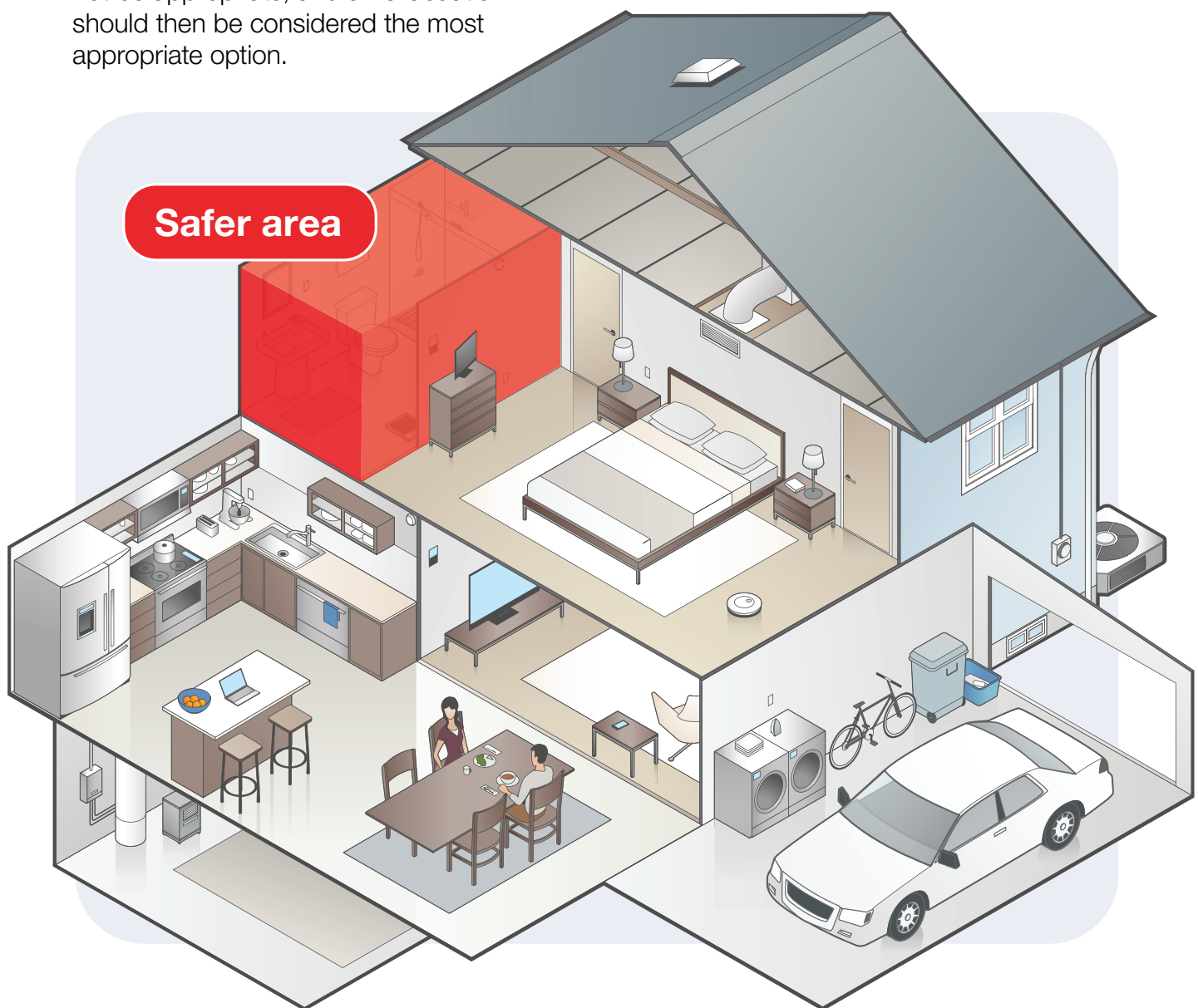
### How long should a safer area keep me safe?

The total time taken to force entry into the premises and breach the safer area is the delay time that should be considered. Ideally,

it should be sufficient to delay an attacker long enough for you to alert the police and allow them to respond. Consideration should be given to the location of the premises in which the safer area is positioned. It is likely that a premises in a large metropolitan area will receive a faster police response than in a remote rural area. The location of the safer area, the existing protection and the likely police response time will help determine the extent of the enhancements required. Any time gained by delaying attackers should be considered beneficial. However, in some situations, the use of a safer area may simply not be appropriate, and an evacuation should then be considered the most appropriate option.

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Where possible, all doors, windows, patio doors and walls identified as being vulnerable to forced entry attacks should either be enhanced or secured with products that have achieved LPS 1673.

### How can attackers be delayed from approaching the safer area?

It may be possible to delay attackers by concealing the location of the safer area and using devices outside of the safer space to delay or hinder attackers, such as using security fogging devices designed to obscure vision. Further information on such measures is contained in the [MTA – supplementary guidance Active Delay Systems](#).

### What structural elements may need strengthening?

Safer areas will be vulnerable to attack through their doors and walls. If safer area windows are easily accessible, then consideration should be given as to how the vulnerability can be reduced. Where possible, all doors, windows, patio doors and walls identified as being vulnerable to forced entry attacks should either be enhanced or secured with products that have achieved LPS 1673. For more information on enhancing doors, walls, and windows, as well as LPS 1673, see NPSA guidance on enhancing the protective security provided by [doors, windows, patio doors and walls](#).

### What are your constraints?

These may be financial, structural, accessibility or weight limitations (if you choose very robust measures). Some changes may require consultation with the landlord to implement and the guidance of a construction professional or structural engineer to determine whether they are safe to introduce.

The needs of more vulnerable people, such as children, the elderly, or disabled people who are likely to be present, must also be considered.

### How should the risk of firearms attacks be considered?

If it is assessed that an adversary is likely to force entry into a premises, locate a safer area and attempt to shoot through doors or walls (such tactics are very risky for an adversary if they seek to evade capture), then the risks can be further reduced by one or more of the following options:

- Enhance doors and walls so they provide protection from ballistic threats (e.g. BS EN 1522/3). This is unlikely to be an option for many residences due to a combination of practical factors, such as weight, space, everyday useability and cost.
- Re-evaluate the location – are other locations better suited to reduce this vulnerability?
- Actions to take once inside the safer area to reduce vulnerability – such as keeping out of sight by keeping low and hiding behind any furniture or exploiting the shapes of the room to minimise your exposure.
- Use of personal protective equipment (e.g. body armour) – this is generally not recommended and should only be considered if the risk is so severe that there are no practical alternative options.



**The safer area should be large enough to accommodate those who live with you and be designed to offer as much delay as possible until the emergency services arrive.**

## How should I protect a safer area against fire?

Fire protection is, in general terms, designed to reduce the spread of fire, and support escape and firefighter access. In this case, the intention is to stop the fire and smoke causing harm to the occupant(s) of the safer area and for the occupants to have a safe means of escape if they feel that staying is riskier than leaving.

- Install fire detection, which may include both smoke detectors and heat sensors. These should be placed throughout the building, including inside and near the safer area, so that when an alarm is triggered outside the safer area, it provides a visual signal in the safer area. If using an audible alarm within the premises, consider whether the alarm can be silenced when making calls to the emergency services. Regular checks should be made to ensure they continue to work correctly.
- Consider the deployment of an automated fire suppression system. This may be particularly useful if there is no alternative means of escape from the safer area.
- Two means of escape from the safer area are highly desirable but may simply not be achievable.
- Fire protection ratings are designed to prevent fire breaching from one area to another. Whilst useful as a last resort, you should be considering escaping before your route is blocked. The doors to a safer area should, therefore, have a minimum of 30 minutes of fire resistance, but, ideally, you should achieve a higher rating. Consideration should also be given to using fire rated plasterboard that will achieve a similar delay time.

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**The door to a safer area should have a minimum of 30 minutes fire resistance.**

- As changes are being made in relation to either security or fire safety, it is important to make certain that the impact of any changes is fully understood and one enhancement does not compromise another aspect of safety or security.
- Avoid the use of electronic locks that might fail in a fire and use thumbturn or manual locks that operate from the secure side of the door.
- Consider what can be done to reduce the impact of accelerants being put beneath the door. This may include the use of automatic drop seals and threshold plates.<sup>2</sup>
- Consider how the impact of smoke ingress into the safer area can be mitigated. Ideally, you should also install fire rated heat-resistant seals around the door. If seals are not fitted, in the event of a fire, you can:
  - o use a rolled-up fire blanket or towel at the base of the door
  - o open a window to help ventilate the room in the event of a fire.
- Avoid storing combustible material adjacent to or in the vicinity of your safer area.

For further fire safety advice, consult your local fire & rescue service National Inter-Agency Liaison Officer (NILO).

<sup>2</sup> For more information, see NPSA Fire as a Weapon guidance.



### What should be available within the safer area?

The contents of the safer area are intended to enable you to:

- monitor the threats
- communicate with the emergency services and others
- protect life.

See Annex A for detailed list of items to be kept in a safer area.

### How should I monitor the threat?

- Use a home security camera system that allows monitoring from the safer area of the main access points and immediately outside the safer area.
- Where possible, cameras monitoring the area outside the safer area should be either covert or located out of reach from the intruder e.g. at the top of a stairwell.

### How should I communicate with the emergency services?

- Locate a panic button within the safer area (see [NPSA Home Security Systems guidance](#)).
- A means to communicate with the police should be available within the safer area. This may be via a mobile phone that is kept charged, has credit and a signal or a landline phone. It is also possible to text the emergency services, but you will need to register your phone beforehand<sup>3</sup>. This will enable you to pass critical information to the police and other emergency services and for the police to confirm when they are on site and that it's safe for you to leave the safer area.

Consideration should be given as to the safest means of communicating with the emergency services. The use of text may allow you to pass and receive messages in silence and so not alert attackers to your location.

<sup>3</sup> [Register your phone for 999 texts.](#)



You should develop a simple plan for using the safer area.

### **What equipment do I need in the safer area?**

A checklist of all items that could be included in the safer area is included in Annex A.

### **What else should I have access to?**

Consider who is likely to use the safer area. If this includes young children or those who are vulnerable because of their age or disability, consider what they may need to keep them comfortable and quiet for an extended period.

### **Do I need to practise using the safer area?**

You should develop a simple plan for using the safer area. If you have children or adults who are vulnerable because of their age or disability, you should familiarise them with the arrangements. This may mean that once a year or when new people are regularly in the building, you practise with them what you would all do if you need to use the area.

Checks should also be conducted occasionally to confirm that all the equipment within the safer area works effectively.

Develop an evacuation plan that you can trigger if you decide that it is safer for you to leave your safer area. This plan should also be practiced.



### **Where can I get further advice?**

Some of the above guidance requires specialist knowledge to deploy. It is recommended that you obtain advice on the design and installation requirements of safer areas. Further information on these measures is available from your local police Counter Terrorism Security Adviser (CTSA) who will be able to refer you to the appropriate specialist advice for your situation.

# Annex A

The following should be located within the safer area:

## Means to monitor the threat

Providing the capability to monitor:

- Intruder alarms.
- Fire detection systems.
- Security camera coverage of main access points.
- Security camera coverage immediately outside the safer area.
- Other security systems that are installed.

## Means to call the emergency services

Consider the most effective, practical and appropriate means to communicate with the emergency services. This could be a combination of:

- Providing access to a mobile phone and charger or power bank, with emergency contact details stored.
- Considering setting up the ability to text the emergency services.
- Installing a landline telephone.
- Installing an intruder alarm with a panic button in the safer area.

## Means to protect life

Providing access to:

- Trauma first aid kit (see <https://www.protectuk.police.uk/advice-and-guidance/response/supporting-information-public-access-trauma-first-aid-kits>).
- A fire safety pack that contains:
  - o A water-mist extinguisher to deal with fires to flammable substances such as plastics, wood, paper, textiles and furniture, etc
  - o A fire blanket
  - o Break-glass hammer
  - o Fire evacuation hoods.
- A torch.
- If a bathroom is used, other useful items such as water and towels.
- Drinking water.



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