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Airbnb safety risk to festival fans as Edinburgh flat-owners cash in

Emma Yeomans

August 10 2019, 12:01am, The Times



Airbnb owners, many of whom use key boxes, do not have to meet basic safety standards
TIMES PHOTOGRAPHER JAMES GLOSSOP



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As hundreds of thousands of artists and fans [flock to Edinburgh for the festival](#), hotels and holiday homes have been booked up months in advance.

meet basic safety standards and have been blamed for hollowing out communities and pushing residents out of their homes.

Landlords in the most desirable areas can more than double their income by turning rental homes into Airbnbs. But of a sample 150 properties on the website, more than a tenth did not report a smoke alarm or carbon monoxide detector and a third had only a smoke alarm. This raised concerns that visitors are staying in [unsafe accommodation](#).

“What we’re seeing now is a race to the bottom,” Rob Trotter, of the letting agency DJ Alexander, said. “This is the dangerous thing.”

Andy Wightman, Green MSP for the Lothian region, said he believed that most short-term lets were illegal, either because they failed to meet safety and planning regulations or because of mortgage and insurance restrictions.

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Landlords who let the entire property to a third party should have gas and fire safety checks, he said. “The problem is that short-term let operators often don’t know that.”

However, the regulation is murkier. Responding to a Scottish government consultation, City of Edinburgh council said there were no clear safety rules. This is contested by industry bodies. “The professional self-catering sector is heavily regulated, and

prevention and health and safety regulation in place alongside our code of conduct. However, there is occasionally a lack of clarity caused by amateur hosts being unaware of their responsibilities.

“There is a real lack of information, and the solutions to that need to come from local authorities, the Scottish government, and the industry.” All properties owned by association members meet the safety requirements.

The council carries out planning inspections where it thinks an Airbnb host is operating illegally, and has shut some down. In one case a “party flat” set up for 20 people and in which gas bottles were stored in the living room was closed after anti-social visitors made life hell for neighbours. In another, council officials found a block of short-term lets where one property had been converted to a linen closet and the cleaning regime was “akin to a hotel”.

Officials and residents are concerned that Edinburgh’s communities are being lost to a transient population. “You hear about people living in a tenement and they’re the only person there full time,” Kate Campbell, the council’s housing convener, said. “My concern is that person on a cold day in November is probably the only person in that property, which is a safety issue, the only person heating their property, which drives up cost, and also the isolation.”

Airbnb said that the platform took safety seriously, including notifying guests if hosts did not report safety features. A spokeswoman said: “There is clear fire safety guidance from the Scottish government for all types of accommodation rented on Airbnb. The safety of our community is our priority and we urge all hosts to keep their homes safe. We also work with the National Fire Chiefs Council on fire safety tips tailored specifically for hosts, and we provide access to free smoke and carbon monoxide detectors.”

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