
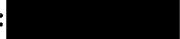



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Date : 22nd March 2007

Dear Ian,

NATIONAL FIRE SAFETY RECOMMENDATIONS FROM HERTFORDSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE'S INVESTIGATION INTO THE HARROW COURT HIGH RISE INCIDENT

You will be aware of the fire in a tower block in Stevenage in February 2005 which claimed the lives of two firefighters and one resident. The internal fire and accident investigation conducted by Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service (HFRS) made a number of recommendations. These recommendations were very broad ranging and covered many reference areas.

I have been tasked with taking action on those HFRS recommendations relating to National fire safety issues. I believe CFOA to be the most appropriate forum to discuss and act upon these recommendations. I therefore detail below those relevant recommendations and seek your opinion and guidance as to how best to address these at a national level.

We request that the National CFOA fire safety working group give consideration to the following HFRS National Recommendations detailed below. We copy you the actual recommendation, the 'underlying problem' and the 'desired outcome':

- 1. National Fire Safety Recommendation No.1: *Provision should be made to inform all relevant stakeholders including Local Authorities, Housing Associations and other FRs of the potential dangers associated with the lack of adequate securing of cables in trunking, particularly any which were installed to the 1988 British Standard.***

Underlying Problem:

- During the fire at Harrow Court the plastic fixings used for securing cables melted and the cables then became a fatal hazard to firefighting personnel.
- There is no forum for informing public bodies of hazardous events.

Desired Outcome:

- CFOA is used to share important safety critical information between Local Authorities, Housing Associations and Fire Authorities.
- All stakeholders and public bodies are made aware of the risks associated with using plastic fixings to secure cable which does not conform to existing British Standards.

2. National Fire Safety Recommendation No.2: *The method and effectiveness of smoke ventilation in the stairways and corridors should be re-assessed in light of the fire and any BRE findings. Consideration should be given to the provision of inlet air at ground floor level.*

Underlying Problem:

- There was no permanent provision for ventilation at ground floor level via the entrance doors as required in CP3.
- It is believed that the 'stack effect' occurred due to the lack of low pressure inlet air.

Desired Outcome:

- Ventilation systems as a dispersal method for smoke in high rise buildings are standardised across the country.
- Sufficient provision should be made for inlet air.
- The issue of ventilation should be raised in a national Fire service forum.

3. National Fire Safety Recommendation No.3: *Consideration should be given to fitting intumescent strips and smoke seals to all fire resisting doors, including entrance doors to flats, common areas and staircases.*

Underlying Problem:

- The fire doors separating the lobby from the stairs had neither smoke seals nor intumescent strips fitted.
- No inspection programme in place.

Desired Outcome:

- All fire resisting doors in high rise residential buildings including entrance doors to flats, common areas and staircases are fitted with intumescent strips and smoke seals.
- The issue should be debated at a national level to influence any change in legislation that may be needed.

4. National Fire Safety Recommendation No.4: *Due to the heightened risk of fire affecting many occupants if naked lights or unsafe appliances are used to supplement any electric heating or lighting in this type of building, SBC should seek alternatives to the 'top up' system of electricity supply. An example could be to include within the rent.*

Underlying Problem:

- Electricity supplies inside the flats are the responsibility of the occupier who may not be able to finance an electricity supply using the 'top up' system.

- Occupants experiencing financial difficulties often seek alternative means of lighting (such as candles) when internal electricity supplies to their flats are unavailable.

Desired Outcome:

- Local authority housing providers and housing associations seek alternative methods of supplying electricity for occupants which does not compromise the collective safety of residents when supply is unavailable.

5. National Fire Safety Recommendation No.5: *If Rec.4 is not feasible then the domestic smoke detectors should be re-wired into the communal electricity supply to ensure the only need for the battery back-up will be when there is total mains electricity failure.*

Underlying Problem:

- Domestic smoke detectors installed in flats were not wired into the communal electricity supply and relied solely on the battery back-up.

Desired Outcome:

- Local authority housing providers and housing associations ensure all flats are installed with domestic smoke detectors which are wired into the communal electricity supply.

6. National Fire Safety Recommendation No.6: *Any new or replacement smoke detectors installed within the flats in these type of premises should be fitted with a back-up power supply such as a capacitor or 10 year battery.*

Underlying Problem:

- Occupiers often remove batteries from domestic smoke detectors for alternative uses.
- Occupiers often fail to check the operation of batteries in smoke detectors.

Desired Outcome:

- Local authority housing providers and housing associations fit hard wired smoke detectors supplied from a protected service and back-up batteries or capacitors are fitted to smoke detectors in case of building supply failure.

7. National Fire Safety Recommendation No.7: *The UK Fire Service should explore options for high rise buildings which consider:*

- *the provision of sprinklers in high rise buildings*
- *removal of Break Glass Call Points to prevent vandalism and reduce false alarm calls*
- *installation, removal or zoning of fire alarm in common areas linked to a clear evacuation policy*
- *whether the AFD should be sited in the staircase only and linked to activate AOVs*
- *if fire alarms are to be installed in this type of building, whether it is appropriate and necessary for them to be linked to auto-diallers.*

Underlying Problem:

- There exists a lack of coordinated approach to the range of activities and passive fire safety measures for high rise buildings.

Desired Outcome:

- The DCLG/DTI or CFA coordinates a consistent approach to fire safety standards for high rise buildings.

- 8. National Fire Safety Recommendation No.8: *The proposed amendments to ADB will continue to allow high rise residential buildings to be constructed without a dedicated firefighting lobby, albeit with ventilation to lobbies and corridors. HFRS recommend that this situation is reviewed by DCLG in light of the fire situation at Harrow Court.***

Underlying Problem:

- New buildings will continue to be constructed without dedicated firefighting lobbies.

Desired Outcome:

- The DCLG considers the implications of the incident at Harrow Court in terms of fire safety guidance to the Building Regulations.
- CFA influence a change of legislation concerning high rise buildings and in particular the issue of dedicated firefighting lobbies.

- 9. National Fire Safety Recommendation No.9: *The following areas are significant and may warrant further investigation and research as they have national implications concerning legislative requirements:***
- *The effect of a non-ventilated protected corridor*
 - *The effect of a non-ventilated lobby*
 - *The effect of single door protection to the staircase enclosure*
 - *The effect of numerous fire doors being open due to hose and fire fighting operations*
 - *The chimney effect in the main stairs*
 - *The effect of AOVs within the staircase enclosures and their effect on the fire behaviour*
 - *Whether the specification of the AOVs was appropriate regarding the outlet and inlet areas*
 - *The possibility that the AOVs allowed air into the staircase, due to atmospherics around the building in the early stages*

Underlying Problem:

- All areas above potentially played a significant part in the fire behaviour and progression.

Desired Outcome:

- A national group is established comprising experts from the fire safety field and building design research to consider the issues outlined above.

As you would expect, there has been extensive research undertaken and documented covering these areas which have been used by us in reaching the recommendations and the associated 'desired outcome'. Much of this we will be able to share with you if required. We would also offer our full assistance, and hope to be included in any discussions, working groups, research work etc.

Please do not hesitate to contact me on the above number, or my mobile [REDACTED] should you wish to discuss further or require additional information.

Yours Sincerely

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