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Tall Storeys: Rising to the challenge of Fire Safety

Tall buildings are back in fashion. The Mayor of London, Ken Livingston, recently announced he hopes to see 20 new skyscrapers in the capital by 2015. Naturally the renewed impetus to build tall buildings in London will be widely reflected throughout Britain's other major cities. But recent changes to Government guidance on fire safety, Approved Document B (AD B), do not include adequate provision for tall buildings, according to David Sugden of the Passive Fire Protection Federation (PFPF). "AD B fails to give specific guidance for buildings that are significantly over 30m. So the regulations for the construction of a building 31m in height and one of 331m are the same! Yet clearly such buildings represent very different propositions, in terms of evacuation and collapse in the event of a fire."

"Fires in modern tall buildings can last for more than 24 hours. But the guidance offered by AD B requires a structural resilience of just two hours," explains Sugden. "Preventing fire movement within a building is also fundamental to fire safety and not covered with enough emphasis in AD B." The Passive Fire Protection Federation (PFPF) draws its membership from across the fire safety community including industry, authorities and technical institutes.

Current regulations concentrate on the successful evacuation of burning buildings. But property protection lies largely outside the scope of regulation. This severely underestimates the true cost of fires. Moreover AD B only provides recommendations applicable to the most common building situations. It doesn't set out advice for complex multi-functional buildings. The latest generation of tall buildings tend to

combine residential, leisure and commercial uses and function outside traditional scenarios.

David Sugden continues, “We welcome the recent revisions to AD B which are very important but do not answer this problem. The trend towards taller and more complex multifunctional buildings presents significant challenges for fire safety. This needs to be resolved at the point of construction - so debate has to happen now.”

END

325 words

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Editors notes: The Passive Fire Protection Federation (PFPF - www.pfpf.org) is dedicated to growing awareness and giving advice on fire protection, and the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (RRO). Our members include the Chief Fire Officers Association, the Department of Communities and Local Government (previously the ODPM), the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors and the Building Research Establishment among others. Our website carries advice on what to check and best practice in all passive fire protection measures