

WITNESS STATEMENT

Criminal Procedure Rules, r27.2; Criminal Justice Act 1967, s.9; Magistrates' Courts Act 1980, s.5b

Statement of: ADAMS, YVONNE

Age if under 18: OVER 18 (if over 18 insert 'over 18')

Occupation: CONTROL STAFF

This statement (consisting of 7 page(s) each signed by me) is true to the best of my knowledge and belief and I make it knowing that, if it is tendered in evidence, I shall be liable to prosecution if I have wilfully stated in it anything which I know to be false, or do not believe to be true.

Signature: Y. ADAMS

Date: 11/10/2017

Tick if witness evidence is visually recorded ☐ (supply witness details on rear)

This statement is my account of the Grenfell Tower fire that took place on Wednesday 14th June 2017.

I have been employed by the London Fire Brigade as a Control Room Officer (CRO) for 45 years. I currently work on a six day shift rota within our 'watches', which is another word for team. Our first shift is 8am-8pm. The second is a shorter day where we either work 8am-4pm or 2pm-10pm. The third day is a night shift 8pm-8am. The following three days are our days off, where we then rotate back to day one. The three shifts are described as a 'tour'. As a CRO I deal with answering 999 calls, mobilising units, radio transmissions, paging and liaising with other officers.

These roles vary and our watch CROs rotate roles. I will describe the individual roles as a CRO in the control room. My main role is taking calls. We are all trained to do this. In this role the CRO will deal with answering calls, assessing the calls, mobilising units, dealing with actions/alerts in the control room, admin calls, press calls and other various tasks. As a radio transmitter you are there to take any messages from appliances at incidents. You take a message and pass it onto a supervisor if necessary, continuing contact with appliances on the ground. As a pager officer I would be responsible for ensuring there were enough correct senior officers present at an incident, for example, I would ensure that there was a Press Officer and a Fire Safety Officer. If there is a large fire that requires senior officers' attendance, the pager officer would message them via pager and is responsible for having the right amount of officers for the

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incident. These roles are all from the same seated position in the control room and we prioritise call taking, so if it gets busy, you will assist others in taking calls.

On answering a call, a CRO would ask the caller for the nature of the incident and where they are. From the information given, the CRO would select the appropriate Incident Type Code (ITC code) on the system. From there, you answer various fields on the system to find the address and the recommended attendance, before mobilising appliances. You would normally let the caller go.

A call may sometimes become a 'Fire Survival Guidance' call or FSG in short. A call becomes FSG when a caller is unable to get out of a building/house due to a fire or smoke. This initiates a set procedure on our system to deploy certain appliances and ask set questions such as where they are in the building. A CRO would raise their hand to inform a Supervisor who will usually come over and listen to the call to assess what resources are required. National advice for FSG calls in high rise buildings is to 'stay put' and await rescue, blocking any smoke with towels, alongside reassurance. A CRO would usually stay on the phone to the caller until rescued.

On joining the London Fire Brigade 45 years ago I trained at the original control centre in Lambeth, London. This was eight weeks of training with tele printers, magnetic tallies as there were no computers in those days. Our control rooms then became computerised and I had further training for different systems that were used over the years. We currently use a system called VISION which is run by Capita. It is not a great system and has various problems. It keeps freezing on us, sends the wrong attendance to a scene and address searches can bring up the wrong results, not identifying what type of building a venue is. This is frustrating for us as CRO's because we need to be quick and efficient when taking emergency calls. Sending the incorrect level of appliances/units to an incident can become very problematic. VISION is meant for smaller brigades, not the London Fire Brigade. I have learnt a lot through on the job experience, rather than on training courses that are provided.

I am currently based at the Operations Command Centre in Merton, South West London. This is a large control room with plenty of space. We also have a fall back centre in Stratford, East London. We are occasionally based out of Stratford due to essential maintenance work being done at our base in Merton meaning we cannot operate from there. The centre at Stratford is smaller than Merton and closer to home for me.

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I will now talk about the night of Tuesday 13th June going into Wednesday 14th June 2017. I was on a night shift starting work at 8pm on that Tuesday. That night we were working from our Stratford fall back Centre with our Command Centre at Merton being closed for maintenance. I was working with my Watch and we had the minimum staffing levels of eleven, including the three Supervisors, Alexandra NORMAN, Peter MAY and Debbie REAL. The Control Room Officers (CRO's) that night were myself, Sharon DARBY, Pamela JONES, Christine HOWSON, Heidi FOX, Peter DUDDY, Sarah RUSSELL and Angie GOTTIS.

I was assigned as the Pager Officer for the night, working alongside the other Control Room Officers. I started work at 8pm and it was all very normal for the first few hours. Sharon DARBY and I had a rest period at around midnight. The CRO staff rotate rest periods throughout the shift.

Sharon DARBY and I returned to our desk at 1am. Pamela JONES, who was sitting next to me, took the initial call for Grenfell Tower. The call that Pam took was not a Fire Survival Guidance (FSG) call. With Stratford being a small control room, you can hear what other CRO's are saying on their calls. I believe it was a flat fire involving a fridge, which is a pretty standard call to assess and mobilise units too. I know Pam had some trouble with the system locating what type of building Grenfell Tower was, and it was sending only the minimum appliances required for a house fire, which I think is three. This is based upon the system not recognising the building as high rise and therefore was not sending the right number of appliances. One of our supervisors Peter MAY thought it should have been a high rise attendance and I think he 'Googled' what type of building it was, and how many floors it had. Any building that has 5+ floors is a 'high rise' building that requires minimum four appliances for attendance. After looking at Google and seeing that Grenfell Tower was technically a high rise building, Peter manually added on the required amount of appliances to send to the call and it was dealt with. Supervisors can manually amend this on the system.

I personally didn't take a call for the next 15-20 mins, and don't remember many calls being taken by the other CRO's. All of a sudden there was call after call coming in regarding the fire. It got so busy that I began to take calls myself and come away from my role as pager officer. I remember taking numerous calls from people about Grenfell Tower but cannot remember specifics about most of them because there were so many. In summary it was people saying there was smoke coming into their flat, or that the building was on fire. When a person would call I would ask immediately for their address and what was happened. I would only ask for names of the caller if they were trapped.

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I remember taking a call from a man on the 20th floor who was saying there was smoke coming into his flat. This was shortly after the initial call and I don't think it was a 'Fire Survival Guidance' call. I told him that he would be ok because the fire was on the 4th floor at that point. I hadn't received any new information or update so assumed that was still the case and thought how he could be affected on the 20th floor. I gave him advice to put towels under the doors and try to get some fresh air to help prevent the smoke from coming in before the call ended. The 'Fire Survival Guidance' calls then began to come in, which all us CRO's were dealing with.

The standard policy for FSG calls in a high rise building is to 'stay put', blocking smoke with towels, move to another room and other pieces of advice which varies on the circumstances of the call. This is the advice that I was giving. I couldn't stay on the phone to the callers due to the high volume of calls coming in and usually a Supervisor would come and listen to the call, but with so many calls coming in, we were on our own dealing with these calls. There were too many.

I do remember one call from a lady in the tower who was in a panic and screaming. I tried to get the basic information such as flat number and floor, but she cleared the line. I tried to call her back but there was no answer on the phone. As the calls continued, I remember more and more people from various flats calling to say there was smoke in their flats and fire. I continued to give the standard 'stay put' advice if it was a 'Fire Survival' call. I did ring the Command Unit at the scene to pass on details of the flats in trouble, based on the calls that I had taken. Normally they are informed by message, but a call was easier and quicker in these circumstances.

A short while later, the Officer of the Day, Mr OLIFFE (don't know his first name) took control of that role, so from that point any calls that I took I just wrote on a scrap piece of paper and gave to Mr OLIFFE to pass onto the Command Unit. The radios can be so rigid and busy that it just seemed a quicker way of doing it. I think they were writing flat numbers on a whiteboard but I just continued to write everything on scrap paper whilst taking the calls, and handing it on.

At around 2.30-2.45am I remember being told in person by our Operations Manager Alexandra NORMAN that the advice to callers had changed and was now to 'get people out' and self-rescue. She told all us CRO's, going round the desks. This is not normal policy and is really alien to me as it has never happened before. All of a sudden I was telling people to get out of the building giving them advice

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to find the nearest staircase, asking them if they can get out. I didn't know how many staircases there were in that building, but could only advise and reassure any callers.

During the next hour or so, I just continued to take calls from people inside and outside the building. Some were FSG calls, some were not but I was continuing to give the new instructed advice to 'get out'. I didn't have much information coming back to me with updates on this fire. After discussion, one supervisor, Peter MAY, said we would not put the television on because the thought was that supervisors did not want to cause us to be upset. I understood what he was thinking, but this meant that I was trying to give advice to people without seeing the building fire. As a CRO I like to know what I am dealing with, because it helps me give advice to callers. After a couple of hours things began to quieten down and there were less calls coming in. None of us CRO's had a break due to the constant flow of calls. Peter DUDDY and Pamela both had really long calls to deal with. I remember our Senior Operations Manager Joanne SMITH and Adam CRINION coming into the control room at some point. I can't remember what time this was but they must have been called in to assist.

At one point I remember Pamela showed me a photo of Grenfell Tower. I could not believe it was on fire, the whole building. I thought to myself, oh my god these people are dead. How could they get out? I felt pure shock.

As the shift was ending I took a call from a male who was desperate to tell us about a man on the 8th floor who was waving from the window. I was trying to get the caller to describe what side of the building it was, where he was telling me it was in front of the green area. I wanted more information so called him back and then forwarded on the information to the helicopter via radio transmission who took control of this. That was the last contact I had about this person on the 8th floor but I think they got him out. I think I took over 40 calls that night whilst on duty, including some Fire Survival Guidance calls, both giving the National advice of 'stay put' and advice to 'get out' once I was instructed to change my advice. At one point Adam went to McDonalds to buy us some food as we had no opportunity for a break.

The day shift came on duty at 8am and our handovers as CRO are normally on a one to one basis. Alison KITCHENER relieved me so I gave her a brief update on the fire and said to her that we may have lost about 100 people. It was just so hard to comprehend so the handover was short. I think I left work at about 8.30am after seeing a Counsellor who Joanne SMITH asked to come in and see us before we went home.

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I feel like we did our best that night. I am really proud of our Watch and everyone just got on with their work. It was a calm atmosphere thanks to our experienced Supervisors that night who were amazing. Some of my Watch went to the scene a week or so later. It was really moving to see the extent of the damage.

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