

WITNESS STATEMENT

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

Statement of: BECKHAM, CAILI

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

Occupation: FIRE CONTROL OPERATOR

This statement (consisting of 4 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: C BECKHAM

Date: 26/01/2018

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

This statement refers to my account of events from the Grenfell Tower fire that took place on Wednesday 14th June 2017.

I am currently employed by Surrey Fire & Rescue Service. I joined the service in 2015 as a Call Operator, which was my role on the night of the Grenfell Tower fire. Since that night I have been promoted to the role of Crew Commander within the control room.

On joining Surrey Fire Service, I had three months of initial training where I learnt the basics of the fire service and call taking process. This included learning about appliances / stations / topography / motorways / radios / calls and fire survival guidance. After the initial three months of training we moved into the control room environment where we would begin to take calls and work on live incidents. Over two years I had to complete an on the job NVQ where I had to show competency in various areas of the role. A Supervisor would sign a witness statement to state that I had experience in a certain area and was competent in that criteria. Once that NVQ was complete and I showed competency in all the criteria, I was classified as competent in my role as a call operator.

As part of our training we learnt about Fire Survival Guidance. This is advice that is given to a caller who is trapped by fire in a premises and it is given to help them survive. The advice given varies from call to call but can include closing doors / blocking doors / opening windows and covering mouths with cloths. Fire Survival calls are not often in Surrey Fire Service and I have one previous experience on dealing with a call involving FSG where there was a fire in a man's flat and he passed out by the front door. Each

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call is individual and people can react differently when on the phone. Some can over react and some may do nothing, but ultimate aim is to keep people safe.

With regards to the 'stay put' policy, a building may be designed to contain a fire and people should be safe inside their own flats, then await rescue. I volunteer in sheltered accommodation and if a fire alarm rings in the communal area, the advice to residents is for them to stay inside their flats where it is safer. However, if the fire alarm is inside a flat, it may be safer for people to get out. I don't know if this policy is for all property types.

Our control room is a small setup with four members of staff working on a shift. This will include the Officer in Charge, Call Operator, Admin Operator and Radio Operator. The Officer in Charge will be in charge of the control room, monitoring calls and staff throughout the shift. The Call Operator primarily answers the emergency calls. The admin operator primarily answers and deals with admin based calls, but can assist the call operator if there is a flurry of calls coming in.

When a call comes into our control room it flashes up on the screen in front of the call taker. As a call taker I will answer the call and say "Fire and Rescue, how can I help?". The caller will generally tell me what the problem is and I will ask for the address. I can then create an incident number, assess the incident type, and begin to mobilise appliances. I will then ask the caller for further information to get a basic understanding of the incident, which I will then update on the system in front of me. This information can include local landmarks, location of the fire, how many people are inside. That information is then relayed by the Radio Operator to the appliances attending the incident. On deciding an incident type, we get prompts on the screen with an action plan as to what we do. This can include how many appliances we send, if an aerial ladder is required, how many people are inside etc. The Officer in Charge will generally monitor the call and listen in.

If we take a call on behalf of another Fire Brigade, we will create an incident and obtain the information from the caller as if it was a normal call. We will then pass all the information to the fire brigade that covers the incident area by telephone. We don't keep the caller on the line or pass the call through. I have no previous knowledge of Grenfell Tower prior to this fire, and I do not have much previous experience in dealing with incidents in high rise buildings. There are not many high rise buildings in Surrey.

On the night of the 13th-14th June 2017 I was working a night shift from 1800hrs to 0900hrs. the crew I was working with on that night was Watch Commander Clare STANBRIDGE, Crew Commander Rob BROWN, Call Operator Laura WATERS and me as the other Call Operator.

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The night started like a lot of nights; very quiet. We completed some routine admin to begin with and at 2315hrs Clare and Laura went on their break which can be for a few hours depending on whether the night is quiet. I remember it was just after 2am when we received a call from a female who sounded very distressed. She said that her father in law was trapped on the 22nd floor of somewhere that sounded like 'Renfield Towers'. She gave me the postcode but because it was a London one we were unable to search for it because we can only search county wide. She also said that he was in flat 194. I took all the details I could at the time and assured her I would call London and make them aware. At the time I did not know the scale of the incident and assumed that the call had come through to us in error as that sometimes happens. I passed the details to Rob who then phoned London. When he got off the phone to me he said that they were taking a lot of calls.

I checked BBC News and Twitter and then saw the scale they were talking about - 200 firefighters. It was horrifying. I had never seen anything quite like it and was actually quite surprised that we had not been made aware by London of the scale and that we may receive overflow calls. We assumed that because we had not heard from London then they must have been dealing with it adequately. To be honest we were caught completely off guard. We had not been informed how London was dealing with it. A little later on the same number called again, and I spoke to the lady. She stated that she had spoken to her father in law and told him that the flames were coming through the floor and he did not know what to do. I heard her husband in the background who was hysterical. Having spoken to London it was advised by that point that he needed to get out and to put anything wet he could over his face and make his way out as best he could.

We kept checking the live updates and all I could see was a tower that was a complete inferno. With the night sky as a backdrop it made it look even worse. Again, Rob and I both spoke to London separately. When I spoke to them and tried to pass on the details that he was trapped and the fire was coming up through the floor the lady in London sounded really busy and I had to try and force her to take the details down. I rang the family back and told them that I had passed on the information to London and this time I spoke to the son. I could hear the desperation in his voice. That was really difficult to take. We all knew that it was not looking likely that he was going to be able to get out. It was his sense of realisation. His son said that it was dark, smoky and that he was 70 years old. There was too much smoke and he could not get out. I felt completely helpless - I simply could not do anything to help these poor people. I had passed the information on to London and called the family back but there was nothing else I could do.

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Rob spoke to London again who asked if he could ring both Kent and Essex and advise them that London's 'stay put' policy had changed and that everyone was being told to get out as safely as they could. We did not take any further calls from the public regarding Grenfell Tower. Rob and I discussed whether we should phone the man in flat 194. However, we decided against it. We knew that the information we had given his family would be passed to him. We came to the awful conclusion that he was not going to get out and he would want to speak to his family rather than strangers. That was really hard to take.

Our entire involvement last only about 40 minutes. But we had no idea how impactful those 40 minutes would be. It just felt surreal. We kept watching Sky News which started broadcasting it at about 3am and we could see the development of the fire.

By about 3.20am we were told to go on our break so Rob and I left the Control Room and made our way to the rest rooms. I lay on a bed for about 4 hours with my head racing through the events of the night. After the calls I had been taken from London I knew there was nothing that could be done and I knew that man was going to die. His son desperately wanted to hear that someone was coming for his father but I knew that that was not going to happen. Rob and I did go back in to the Control Room for the rest of the shift and carried out normal admin routines.

At a later date, Rob and I were spoken to by Pat SHERIDAN, a Watch Commander responsible for handling Critical Incident stress debrief. That was good. Rob wanted to know the name of the man who had died but I did not and still do not want to know. In the days afterwards all I could see and hear were things to do with Grenfell Tower. It was horrible. After that night I had gone on to my 4 rest days which was a good way to de stress but when I came back it was all anyone was talking about. I learnt to put it to the back of mind and not think about it. In my mind I had dealt with it. In the lead up to giving a statement I listened to the calls again so that I could refresh my memory and in doing so the emotions have come flooding back. I still find the whole thing terribly upsetting.

I have provided a copy of our call log relating to Grenfell Tower and exhibit this as CSB/1.

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Form MG11(T)

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