

# Frequently Asked Questions following the Grenfell Tower incident

In response to questions and concerns from the public following the Grenfell Tower fire, we have detailed a number of frequently asked questions. These will be regularly reviewed and updated.

## **Has Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service's policy changed following this incident?**

No, the approach adopted by Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service (DWFRS) remains the same.

If you have a fire or become aware of a fire in your home, which includes blocks of flats, you should get out, stay out and call us out.

If you live in a block of flats where your landlord has advised you to 'stay put' in the event of a fire, this is their advice which will be based on an individual fire risk assessment for that building.

## **What happened at Grenfell Tower?**

The cause of this fire is still subject to an investigation which will determine origin, spread and fire development and any subsequent learning.

## **What has DWFRS done in response to the tragic Grenfell fire?**

DWFRS has inspected over 180 high rise residential buildings across its area, following the Grenfell Tower tragedy, to check fire safety compliance and to reassure residents that buildings are safe.

Head of Fire Safety, Area Manager Seth Why, said: "Since the tragic fire at Grenfell Tower, we have received numerous enquiries from concerned members of the community who live in high rise buildings. As well as helping people to access our free Safe and Well visits, we want residents in high rise buildings to be assured of the response they can expect from us in the event of a fire and, most importantly, to understand the arrangements for safe evacuation, should it be needed."

Amongst the areas being checked by the service are fire risk assessments, means of escape from the building, fire doors, fire alarms, evacuation plans and emergency lighting.

In addition to the work with residential high rise buildings, the Service is also liaising with its local NHS hospital trusts. Area Manager Why said: "There has been concern nationally about hospital buildings being fitted with the same external cladding as used at Grenfell Tower. The Department for Communities and Local Government has advised us that none of our local hospitals are affected in this way. However, we have worked with trusts to reassure patients and visitors as required."

DWFRS continues to promote the fitting of sprinkler systems in all buildings, as they are known to save lives and reduce property damage. This was proven recently, when a sprinkler system prevented a flat fire in Poole from spreading out of control.

Anyone living in Dorset and Wiltshire can request a free Safe & Well visit from the Fire and Rescue Service – call 0800 038 2323 or visit <http://www.dwfire.org.uk/high-rise-flats>

### **Why is there normally no common fire alarm throughout the building?**

A common fire alarm system is designed to alert everyone within a building at the same time. Where a building is designed to support a 'stay put' approach the staircases may not be wide enough to support a simultaneous evacuation of the entire building. Alarm systems in these types of buildings are generally to open smoke ventilation systems in order to keep the common areas free of smoke for people escaping and our own crews to gain access to fight a fire.

Each flat will have their own stand-alone detection and alarm, which should alert the occupants of the affected flat in the event of fire occurring within that flat. This alarm will not normally be linked to any other area of the block.

There are other areas such as undercover car parks which may have detection and alarm system, but again will not normally be linked to any other part of the block. Any detectors within the common corridors or staircases are likely to be there to activate any ventilation system but will not be designed to sound a warning.

### **What levels of fire resistance should be in between flats?**

If correctly designed and maintained, individual flats should be separated from each other with materials that will resist fires for a minimum of 60 minutes. This is called compartmentation and it should allow sufficient time for the occupants of the affected flat to escape without other flats and escape routes becoming affected. The front door of a residential flat is an important component of compartmentation within high rise buildings. The flat door should be a fire door and should be self-closing to hold back any products of combustion. This should also allow sufficient time for residents to pass by safely ready for the Fire and Rescue Service to extinguish the fire.

### **How do changes to a building over time affect firefighting and fire safety?**

Fire Risk Assessments should identify issues like this, and measures should be put in place to mitigate any additional risk from the changes. Post Grenfell, all housing providers have been requested to ensure their building fire risk assessments is up to date.

### **Will the Fire and Rescue Service have big enough ladders to be able to rescue me?**

DWFRS uses different sizes of ladders and aerial platforms to carry out rescues. Our hydraulic platforms can extend 32 metres from the ground (depending upon circumstances) and they are effective in rescuing from higher floors. We have several aerial ladder platforms across the service, our tallest, due for delivery this year, will be able to reach 42 metres.

Buildings are designed so that rescues can take place internally. In normal circumstances, during a fire within a flat, communal corridors and staircases should remain smoke free, allowing firefighters to carry out rescues from within the building.

We have reviewed our operational procedures for fires in high rise buildings and our initial attendance to this type of incident. Prior to Grenfell, we would initially send four fire engines plus an aerial appliance where there is nobody reported as trapped. This would increase to five where somebody has been reported as trapped. Following Grenfell, we have increased the attendance to 6 fire engines for all fires in high rise-buildings.

### **Are external cladding systems' safe?**

There are numerous types of cladding systems available that provide rain screens and thermal insulation. If you are concerned about a system installed on your premises you are advised to discuss with your housing provider who should be able to advise on the cladding system that has been installed.

### **Has the cladding system been approved?**

Again, there are numerous types of cladding systems in use for rain screens and to provide thermal insulation to buildings. Your housing provider should be able to advise you on the type of cladding system used and the approvals process carried out by the relevant building control body.

### **How many buildings have been visited across Dorset and Wiltshire?**

We have now carried out a fire safety inspection in every high rise building in Dorset and Wiltshire.

### **What is a fire safety audit?**

A fire safety audit is a visit made by a fire service inspector for the purposes of checking whether a building complies with fire safety regulations and is fire safe.

DWFRS may visit non domestic premises and undertake a fire safety inspection, usually prearranged. All fire safety inspectors will be in uniform and carry identification.

The fire safety audit is an examination of the premises and relevant documents to ascertain how the premises are being managed with regards to fire safety.

The emphasis is on checking that duty holders can demonstrate how they are meeting their legal duties. In a workplace, the inspector may also wish to talk to members of staff to confirm their level of fire safety awareness.

Where applicable to the premises the inspector would expect to view documentary evidence - these documents can help demonstrate that a duty holder is fully complying with the law. Such documents include:

- The significant findings of the fire risk assessment
- Records of staff training and fire drills
- Records of testing and maintenance of fire-fighting equipment

- Records of testing and maintenance for all fire safety systems including fire alarms and emergency lighting

Where a failure to comply with fire safety legislation is found, the inspector will decide what action to take. The action will depend on the nature of the breach and will be based on the principles set out in our Fire Safety Enforcement Policy and the Regulator's Code.

### **Has DWFRS got the resources to deal with an incident similar to what happened at Grenfell Tower?**

DWFRS has effectively responded to major fires in the past. We also have mutual aid agreements in place with neighbouring services who can provide us with additional resources if required.

We have reviewed our operational procedures, officers and crews have received additional training. We are also focusing our work on prevention and protection. We are offering residents a Safe and Well visit, which assesses fire risk and takes into account factors such as health and wellbeing, and crime prevention.

**If you have any concerns about the safety of your building you can email [enforcement@dwfire.org.uk](mailto:enforcement@dwfire.org.uk) or ring 01722 691717. You can also find more information on our website by clicking the following links [Fire Safety in High Rise Flats](#) [High Rise Safety Leaflet](#) You should also check your local authority or housing provider's website. Useful links are below.**

[Poole Housing Partnership](#)

[This is Wiltshire](#)