

# FIRE & SAFETY BULLETIN

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## READING BLOCKS TO HAVE CLADDING REMOVED

**A planning application has been approved by Reading Borough Council (RBC) for a series of blocks at Chatham Place, which will have 'high-risk' cladding and timber decking on balconies replaced.**

Last month, the application was submitted to RBC with 'urgent' plans to remove the 'potentially dangerous cladding' from the Hunsaker, Hermitage, Halcyon and Haywards buildings, after investigations revealed that the flats were at 'high risk' in the event of a fire. The application had requested 'urgent' approval from RBC, and came after similar plans were submitted for the Honister and Hewitt buildings 'on the same street'.

Government funding was sought for the remediation work, which includes replacing the external façade and the timber decking on balconies, and should this be unsuccessful 'the flat owners will have to pay for the works'. The privately owned blocks include 211 flats across four buildings, with two 10 storeys high and two eight storeys.

The basement car park at the development was also 'temporarily closed' in 2019 to allow for 'some urgent works to take place', and several investigations of the



buildings revealed that 'due to the materials used within the façade and missing or defective fire barriers', the entire development is a 'high risk in the case of fire'.

As a consequence, the site has a waking watch installed, though the cladding in question is not aluminium composite material. Reading Chronicle has now reported on the approval of the application, with councillors stressing the 'importance of making sure the work was completed quickly' as regards the legacy of the Grenfell Tower fire.

### How often should dry risers be inspected?

BS9990:2015 requires dry risers to be tested under pressure annually with a visual inspection every six months. Replace any worn or missing parts including washers, straps, padlocks, gaskets etc.



## FOCUS ON HINGES

**All fire doors must be affixed with a minimum of 3 hinges, with all screws firmly tightened in place. The screws must be custom fitted for the hinge and the right size, and maintained free from any metal fragments or oil leakage. Any signs of wear must be addressed.**

Fire doors are vital in keeping people safe in buildings – they are an essential part of any structured Fire Safety Plan.

## TAUNTON HOUSE OF MULTIPLE OCCUPATION OWNER PROSECUTED IN WAKE OF SERIOUS FIRE

**On Friday 19 February 2021 at Taunton Crown Court, Ms Nicola Selwood – the owner of 23 Holway Avenue in Taunton, a two-storey end of terrace house providing five let rooms – was given a nine-month prison sentence, suspended for 18 months, having previously entered a guilty plea to three offences under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.**

In point of fact, a single smoke alarm was found by Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service fire safety officers to be the sole fire safety measure for a property that housed up to seven people.

Summing up the case, the presiding Judge at Taunton Crown Court made specific reference as to how the fire at the premises came about and then spread, subsequently gutting the property. This was as a direct result of the

owner not implementing the fire safety measures that Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service and the local housing authority had informed her to put in place back in 2008. As a result, the fire destroyed the house, formerly her family home, which is now uninhabitable. The fire damage was extensive. The cause of the blaze was found to be accidental. One of the males who had evacuated the premises suffered minor burns and was treated by an ambulance crew at the scene.

The blaze has left Selwood with a debt of £100,000. Selwood now has no income, so the episode has effectively bankrupted her and ruined her life.

## FLAT FIRE ~ QUEEN'S PARK

**Four fire engines and around 25 firefighters were called to a flat fire on Carlton Vale in Queen's Park. Part of an electrical intake cupboard on the ground floor of the building and a switchboard were damaged by fire.**

Leading Firefighter Sean Sloan, who was at the scene, said: "Crews attended after water from a flat on the ninth floor of the building made its way down to an electrical intake cupboard on

the ground floor, which caused a small fire. There was quite a lot of smoke coming from the cupboard and properties from the eighth floor down to the ground floor were damaged by the water leak."

The Brigade was called at 1943 and the fire was under control by 0008. Fire crews from Paddington, West Hampstead and North Kensington fire stations attended the scene.



## HELP KEEP FIRE HYDRANTS IN YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD HEALTHY

**Fire hydrants provide firefighters with access to a steady flow of water to fight fires. They are used by crews whenever they need more water than they're able to carry on fire engines, and can be a vital asset for firefighters. However, if they're ever damaged or obscured, it could waste valuable minutes for crews potentially saving lives and property.**

Issues that people can look out for and report to your local Fire & Rescue Services, include:

- ▶ Obstructions over hydrants, such as vegetation
- ▶ Vehicles parked over the inspection chamber
- ▶ Leaking hydrants
- ▶ Hydrant lids which are broken or protruding above the ground

## FIRE DOOR OR NORMAL DOOR... WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

**If a fire door is properly made by a British Woodwork Federation certified manufacturer, with compatible parts, and certified by an accredited third party, it should hold back a fire for 30 minutes or more.**

However, the components – hinges, seals, handles and glazing – are as important as the door itself. This is because, in a fire, doors can warp, move and allow smoke and fire through the opening. The seals and the gaps between the door frame and the wall are really vital too. They also stop smoke and fire spreading as quickly. Letterboxes are a key component to the fire door.

## WAKING WATCH FUND DETAILS RELEASED

**The Government has revealed that the £30m fund will be targeted at London, Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds, Liverpool, Bristol, Newcastle and Sheffield.**

In December 2020, the government announced the waking watch fund to 'help end the scandal of excessive waking watch costs as part of a further move to support thousands of residents' in high rises with fire safety issues. The government said at the time that the fund would also provide funding 'for fire alarms' and 'reduce costs for leaseholders forced to have a waking watch'.

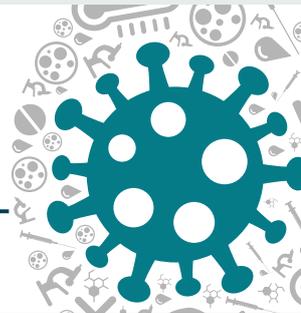
The £30m was allocated to pay for fire alarm installations, 'removing and reducing the need for costly interim safety measures' such as waking watches, and the government had cited National Fire Chiefs Councils view in guidance that building owners 'should move to install common fire alarm systems as quickly as possible to reduce or remove dependence' on waking watches.

It noted that the funding would 'help worried leaseholders who may have faced high costs for interim safety measures by providing financial support and delivering a better, long term fire safety system in their buildings'. Some buildings had already installed alarms 'due to the savings this offers', leaseholders expected to 'collectively' save over £3m per month who had been paying, on average, £137 per month for waking watches.



**For firms who are unsure about the Health & Safety Executive Coronavirus guidance, please visit**

**[www.hse.gov.uk/news/social-distancing-coronavirus.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/news/social-distancing-coronavirus.htm)**



## HORLEY PROPERTY MANAGEMENT BUSINESS FINED £16,000-PLUS FOR BREACHING HMO LEGISLATION



**Failure to comply with Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) legislation aimed at protecting tenants has seen a Horley-based property management company being fined over £16,000.**

Reigate and Banstead Borough Council successfully took action against the private property management company for breaching the fire safety and overcrowding terms of its HMO licence for a two-storey property located in Redhill.

The level of the penalty levied took account of the fact that the company involved attempted to conceal its offending.



## WHAT DO LANDLORDS NEED TO KNOW ABOUT FIRE SAFETY?

If you are a landlord you – and your letting or managing agents – both have a legal duty to keep the people who rent your property safe from fire through the provisions of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.

### FIRE RISK ASSESSMENT

You have to ensure there is a comprehensive fire risk assessment that details the fire safety provisions that are in the property. This is usually carried out by a professional fire risk assessor and might identify additional measures that should be carried out as appropriate.

### ALARMS AND SAFE STRUCTURE

You must also maintain fire detection and the structural protection provided within the building to protect residents and allow them to safely escape from fire or smoke using the corridors and staircases.

### THE EMERGENCY PLAN

You should also develop an emergency evacuation plan for residents and make sure they know the actions they need to take in the event of an alarm or fire occurring.



### FIRE PROTECTION AND 'FIRE STOPPING' IN KEY AREAS

Fire protection and fire stopping to service risers, and between individual flats, corridors and the means of escape routes prevents the rapid spread of fire throughout blocks of flats – and is essential. Unfortunately, this is often breached when utility companies run new services between flats, or between common parts and flats.

### STORAGE AND SECURITY

Tenants storing belongings in communal areas can pose a real risk to safety. Items can accidentally be set alight, or be set alight deliberately.

You need to:

- ▶ Ensure that corridors, stairs and stairwells are clear.
- ▶ Make sure electrical and gas riser cupboards aren't used to store anything.

## HEALTH & SAFETY EXECUTIVE APPOINTS INAUGURAL CHIEF INSPECTOR OF BUILDINGS

**The Health & Safety Executive (HSE) has announced the appointment of a Chief Inspector of Buildings to establish and lead the new Building Safety Regulator.**

Presently the HSE's director of building safety and construction, Peter Baker will take up the post with immediate effect.

The Government asked the HSE to establish a new Building Safety Regulator in the wake of the Grenfell Tower disaster and following recommendations made in the 'Building a Safer Future' report produced by Dame Judith Hackitt in the wake of the Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety.