



NFCC Guidance: Temporary Change to Simultaneous Evacuation in Flats

Fire safety:
Concerns
around cladding
issues.



NFCC Guidance: Temporary Change to Simultaneous Evacuation in Flats

Following the unprecedented national tragedy at Grenfell Tower in June 2017, the National Fire Chiefs Council issued guidance to property managers about steps to be taken where there were concerns around cladding issues. As time went by and more information became available, the guidance was periodically updated and refined. The latest version was issued in August 2022.

**“Guidance
for concerns
around cladding
issues.”**

→ **What is the problem being addressed?**

Thousands of blocks of residential flats in the UK have a ‘stay-put’ policy in the event of fire. This simply means that residents are safely able to ‘stay-put’ in their flat in the event of a fire in another flat in the same block. This policy is only possible if the building has been designed and constructed in such a way that each flat is a separate fire compartment with fire separation being provided in accordance with the Building Regulations.

Sadly, what occurred at Grenfell was that fire separation failed completely. In this case, the cladding which had been added years after the original construction was the primary cause of rapid fire spread, however, a number of other inadequacies were exposed. In the following months and years as the Grenfell inquiry unfolded and other buildings were scrutinised, it became clear that fire stopping has been widely neglected at time of building or had been removed or damaged at other times in the history of a building.

Whatever the root cause, there is now an awareness amongst Fire Risk Assessors, that there may be times when a stay-put is not adequate, and instead a building must be immediately, or 'simultaneously', evacuated in the event of a fire. See building regulations here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fire-safety-approved-document-b>

→ **What are the solutions available?**

The NFCC guidance sets a number of recommended actions including:

→ **Waking Watch**

Waking Watch is simply trained people on site 24/7 to patrol the building and alert the residents in the event of a fire. It is anticipated to be a short-term solution. The ongoing cost is significant, and the only reason it is used is because it can be quickly deployed in situations where the risk is deemed to be high, and an immediate solution is essential.

→ **Alternative Immediate and Transition Period Interim Measures**

This more recent addition to the guidance suggests that some sort of 'technological solution' which detects fire and enables the alarm to be raised, might be suitable as a bridge between Waking Watch and a 'common fire alarm system' (detailed in the next step), subject to a Fire Risk Assessment. This appears to give scope to innovation and acknowledges that full compliance with BS 5839-1 (the standard for fire alarm systems) may not be required during the 'transition period'.

In practice, the cost of such solutions rarely can be justified given that in most cases you still need to detect fire in every flat, so the time to install the solution is not far removed from a full fire alarm system. And when the transition period is completed you have to pay out all over again for a proper fire alarm system.

If the defects with the building could be sorted within the transition period (6 months), then it may be that a such a solution offers financial benefit.

For more information, call us on **0330 7000 777** or email us today at info@howleruk.com

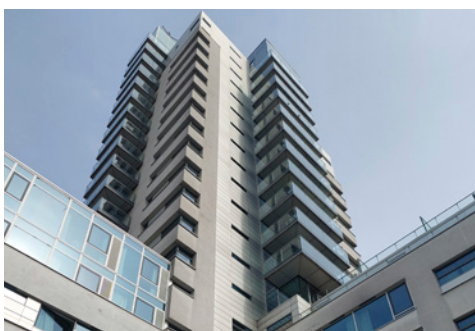
→ **Common Fire Alarm System**

The NFCC guidance recommends that *“The safest and most effective way of ensuring [that residents can escape safely] is by installing a suitable common fire detection and alarm system conforming to British Standard 5839 Part 1 Fire detection and fire alarm systems for buildings – Code of practice for design, installation, commissioning and maintenance of systems in non-domestic premises (BS 5839-1).”*

The location and number of automatic detectors is directed on the Fire Risk Assessment, which considers the deficiencies within the building construction and therefore where a fire needs to be detected. In the case of cladding issues, heat detectors are sited inside every window (except bathrooms, where there is low risk of fire), so that a fire is detected before it breaks out of the building and reaches the cladding.

Every flat must have a fire alarm sounder (or sounders), which is capable of producing 85dB at each bedroom door. Consideration must be given to the safe warning and evacuation of all disabled persons in the building, and a plan must be made accordingly.

In most buildings the quickest, least intrusive, and most cost-effective solution is a radio-link fire alarm system. The building manager always has to have an eye to the future and therefore consideration of the impact to the fabric of the building when the system is removed is important.



→ **Long term solutions**

The NFCC guidance makes it clear that the final goal is to return to a stay-put policy in any building with deficiencies. This can only take place once the deficiencies have been put right and the building is once again safe for people to remain in their flats in the event of a fire in another flat.

In planning any interim measures, it is important that these are part of a longer term strategy to make the building safe. The time it takes to complete the remedial actions will of course depend on the extend of the deficiencies, the cost to fix them, and the availability of funds to carry out the works.

“Safest and most effective way of ensuring that residents can escape safely.”

→ **How can we help?**

We are uniquely suited to help landlords and building owners install wireless fire alarm systems in record time and with minimal disruption. Recognised and appreciated by some of the largest construction contractors and housing associations, we deliver compliance, as efficiently and as painlessly as possible using the most advanced and most effective solutions.

Howler Special Services specialise in the design, specification and installation of radio linked Fire Alarm systems specifically to facilitate change in the evacuation strategy of large residential buildings. The systems typically replace a Waking Watch service and can either be removed once the remedial works are complete or be upgraded to a permanent BS8629 evacuation system.

Visit our special services page for more information: <https://howleruk.com/special-services/>

For more information, call us on **0330 7000 777** or email us today at info@howleruk.com



NFCC Guidance: Temporary Change to Simultaneous Evacuation in Flats

For more information on fire safety in construction, call **0330 7000 777**
or email info@howleruk.com