



TECHNICAL NOTE: GRENFELL TOWER FIRE

On 14.06.2017, a fire believed to have been caused by an electrical fault in a refrigerator broke out in Grenfell Tower, burning for 60 hours, and causing the death of over 70 people. The fire spread rapidly upwards the exterior of the building resulting in flames and smoke on all residential floors. It was accelerated by combustible aluminium composite cladding and external insulation, with an air gap between them enabling the stack effect. Some of the findings from the first report of the Grenfell Tower inquiry stated that building's exterior did not comply with regulations and was the central reason why the fire spread.

Grenfell Tower was designed to be operated under a *stay put policy* in the event of fire. The notion was that if a fire broke out in one flat, thick walls and fire doors would contain the fire long enough for the fire service to bring it under control. Only those in the affected dwelling would be expected to evacuate and residents had been instructed to remain in their flats in the event of a fire. The building was designed under the assumption that a full evacuation would never be necessary. There was no centrally activated fire alarm, fire sprinklers, or fire escape and only a single central staircase.

The Building Safety Act 2022

The Building Safety Act was introduced to parliament on 05.07.2021 as a response to the Grenfell Tower fire. The law was passed on 28.04.2022 and contains *provisions intended to secure the safety of people in or about buildings and to improve the standard of buildings*. Although they apply to all buildings, the requirements are more stringent for higher-risk buildings (HRBs) - buildings with 7 or more storeys or 18 meters or more in height that have at least 2 residential units or are hospitals or care homes.

The Act introduces new building control processes and competency requirements for building contractors and designers to ensure building regulations compliance such as:

- If there is more than one contractor, the client must appoint a principal designer and principal contractor. The client is required to sign a declaration that they are satisfied that the principal designer, principal contractor, and subcontractors are competent.
- During the construction of HRBs, the principal designer, principal contractor, and subcontractors must have a *mandatory occurrence reporting* system under which they are required to report the occurrence of risks likely to lead to death or serious injury to significant numbers of people if left unfixed.
- Building approvals (deposit of plans, initial notices, and plans certificates) will, in future, automatically lapse after 3 years, rather than allowing local authorities to declare them ineffective after such time.
- Corporate directors and managers are liable for offences under building safety legislation where breaches are due to their consent, connivance, or neglect. Enforcement action in relation to breaches of the building regulations will be extended under the Act from 12 months to 10 years.
- The Building Safety Act also limits residential leaseholder liability for defective cladding in existing buildings, and powers to prohibit developers (and potentially others) from carrying out development if they have failed to contribute sufficiently to the remediation of their existing defective buildings.

- Developers are required to provide to purchasers a new build home 15 year warranty for any new build home.

The Building Safety Regulator (BSR)

The Building Safety Act establishes a new Building Safety Regulator, a division of the Health & Safety Executive (HSE). The objectives and responsibility of the BSR are:

- to secure the safety of people in and around buildings
- to improve the standards of buildings
- to facilitate building safety in higher-risk buildings
- to assist the built environment industry and building professionals to improve their competence
- and to make recommendations on these matters.

The BSR is also required to keep the safety and standard of buildings under review.

The BSR will have a range of enforcement powers to ensure non-compliance with building standards or other requirements is corrected, including compliance and stop notices. It will also have powers of prosecution, since failure to comply with many duties under the amended regime will result in a criminal offence being committed (with the potential for fines and terms of imprisonment).

Upon completion of a project, the BSR assesses the building to confirm the work conforms to building regulations and issues a completion certificate.

Handover Documentation

As part of the handover documentation, the principal designer is required to prepare a **Health & Safety File** highlighting health & safety risks for the future use of the building. This document is important for the current occupants of the building and future contractors who will perform additional works on the building.

One of the goals of the Building Safety Act is to encourage dialogue between accountable person/s (e.g. a management company or landlord) and occupants of the building, particularly in respect to providing relevant information. The Building Safety Act also introduced a principle that there should be a continuous 'Golden Thread' of information about safety relevant to the building that is created through all the design, construction, and occupation phases. This information allows someone to understand a building and keep it safe and can be contained in a **Logbook, Building User Guide, and/or Apartment User Guide**.

Dewick & Associates are specialists in building handover documentation and can therefore provide all of the handover documents required to achieve the requirements of the Building Safety Act requirements. All of our documentation is provided with a QR Code which links directly to a folder structure with all files saved accessible to anyone with the manual. This ensures that the documents are accessible by all occupants and tenants for future reference.