



Tyre company director sentenced for fire safety failings

The director of a scrap tyre yard has been handed a suspended prison sentence for a series of fire safety offences after an emergency fire door was nailed shut in a building where workers were living.

Sentencing Tyre Channel Ltd (TC Ltd) and its Director Anup Patel at Southwark Crown Court, His Honour Judge Hehir described the premises in Croydon as “a tinder box in the making”.

Patel and TC Ltd each pleaded guilty to three separate charges relating to breaches of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. The company was ordered to pay a total of £70,000. Patel was given an eight-month prison sentence, suspended for two years.

London Fire Brigade (LFB) Fire Safety Officers visited the premises on Mill Lane after police raised concerns over poor fire safety conditions. Inspectors found a makeshift corridor constructed at the rear of the single-storey industrial unit with several rooms leading off it, including a kitchen and bedrooms which were used as living accommodation for workers at the site.

They found the premises heavily fire loaded with flammable items, including tyres stacked in excess of four metres high and issued a notice later the same day to prohibit the premises from being used for sleeping or residential use.

An emergency fire exit was nailed shut and inaccessible due to piled up tyres and there was no smoke detection in the building. The corridor, which bedrooms were accessed via, was constructed of plywood and would have offered little protection against fire spreading through the premises.



Fines totalling £670,000 for student block fire safety failings

The main contractor was among three firms ordered to pay fines totalling £670,000 after admitting fire safety failings at a building used for student accommodation in Leeds.

Judge Mairs at Leeds Crown Court heard how Trinity Halls on Woodhouse Street had only one available fire escape which was compromised due to combustible materials, putting the 27 students who had moved in back in September 2016 at serious risk.

The court heard the students had moved into the building on the upper ground floor while other floors were still under construction.

There were a string of other failures which contributed to the significant risk, including lack of appropriate fire alarms and detection, exposed timber framing, the storage of flammable items on stairwells and no markings indicating fire escape routes.

Judge Mairs described the situation as having the “potential for catastrophe.”

The failings came to light in September 2016 after a concerned father called West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service (WYFRS) to report the building. He had been dropping his daughter off to live there, but became concerned by the state of the premises and would not let his daughter stay.

Trinity Developments Ltd, the owners of the building, admitted four safety breaches. Niche Homes Ltd, contracted to manage and let the property, also admitted the same four breaches. These are:

- failing to make a suitable and sufficient fire risk assessment
- failing to take precautions to make sure the premises were safe from risk of fire
- failing to provide appropriate fire detection and alarm system
- failing to provide an adequate number of fire escape routes and exits.

In addition to this APP Construction Ltd, who were contracted to design and build the property, admitted one charge of:

- failing to provide an adequate number of fire escape routes and exits.

At previous hearings guilty pleas were entered to the charges, all relating to the period 24th September 2016 to 27th September 2016.

The companies were all offered credit in court for their early guilty pleas. Acceptable safety measures are now in place at the building.

Judge Mairs said that all the companies had “high culpability” and that “the risks were so obvious that a member of the public spotted them – so they should have been obvious to the companies involved.”

In sentencing, he fined APP Construction Ltd £450,000, Trinity Developments Ltd £160,000 and Niche Homes Ltd £60,000. The three companies also agreed to pay

costs. APP Construction Ltd will pay £9,000. Trinity Developments Ltd will pay £6,000 and Niche Homes Ltd will also pay £6,000.

Following the sentencing Chris Kemp, Senior Fire Protection Manager for West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service, said: “This case demonstrates the importance those responsible for building construction, development and occupation have in understanding their duties and acting responsibly to take account of the safety of the people they are responsible for.

“As Judge Mairs highlighted, the dangers and risks found at Trinity Halls were so obvious anyone without a technical fire safety background could identify them. The conditions that were found on site were such that some of our senior officers have not seen such blatant disregard for the law and the safety of residents in 28 years.”



This news story is in partnership with **Barbour EHS**, a specialist information service provider supporting professionals across sectors including fire and security, FM, health and safety, sustainability and energy.

No time to relax our Vigilance

Despite the new regulations that have been introduced or proposed following the Grenfell tragedy in 2017, this is not the time to be complacent about fire. The latest available statistics on fire in England showed that fires actually increased in the year to March 2019. In the 10 years to 2012/13 there had been a steady drop in fires every year, but since then the figure has been slowly creeping up again.

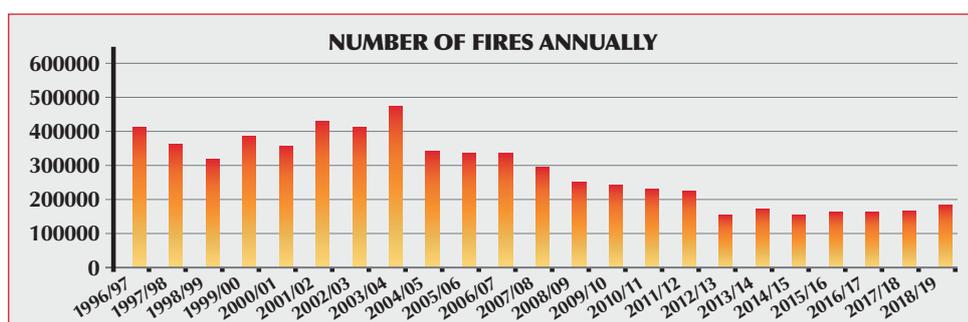
In this last year, 2018/19, the Fire and Rescue Service attended 182,825 fires. This was a nine per cent increase compared with the previous year, a seven per cent increase compared with five years ago but a 27 per cent decrease compared with ten years ago. A significant number of the 2018/19 fires were 'secondary fires', that is, fires that had spread from their original source. The frequency of these largely relates to the weather, and the hot dry summer of 2018 was doubtless in part responsible. But with global heating, we should expect more of these.

The 73,214 primary fires (40% of the 182,825 fires attended) represented a one per cent fall on the previous year. There was no change compared with five years ago (73,230) and a 30% decrease compared with years ago (104,348). In comparison with the previous year, there was a decrease of 4% in fires in dwellings and other buildings Grenfell has, rightly, focused attention on the safety of high-rise buildings but it is worth remembering that such fires, while they have the potential to be devastating, represent a relatively small proportion of all dwelling fires. In 2018/19 only 3% of fires in dwellings were in purpose-built high-rise. Of the 29,570 primary dwelling fires that the Fire and Rescue Service attended, around three-quarters (74%) were in houses, bungalows, converted flats and other properties, whilst around a quarter (26%) were in purpose-built flats.

If we break down the figures for purpose-built flats, we find that 17% of all dwelling fires were in purpose-built low-rise (1-3 storeys) flats/maisonettes and 6% in purpose-built medium-rise (4-9 storeys) flats, leaving that figure of 3% in purpose-built high-rise (10+ storeys) flats. In 2017/18, 52 (6%) of the

801 fires in purpose-built high-rise flats spread beyond the room of origin. This shows that fire is not being contained well. The other really significant figure is how many people died in fires. Every death is a tragedy, so no figure can be considered 'good', but the lower it is the better. In 2018/19 there were 253 fire-related fatalities. This compares to 339 for the previous year, which included the 71 people who died in the Grenfell tragedy.

What these two fires, at which fortunately there were no fatalities, remind us of, is that we must be vigilant. We must work to prevent fire; we must not use materials that encourage it to spread; we must build in a way that prevents it spreading; we must protect means of escape; we must suppress fire wherever possible; we must get rid of smoke; and we must make it possible for the Fire and Rescue Service to do its job as quickly and effectively as possible. Put

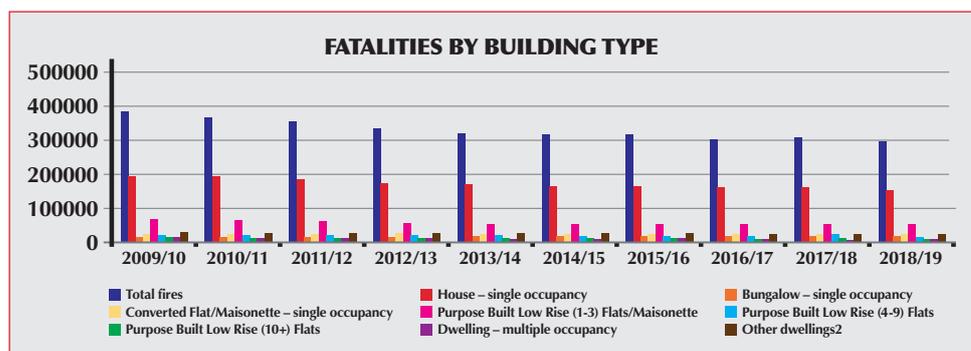


Fire-related fatalities have fallen by 9% compared with five years ago, when there were 278 fire-related fatalities, and by 22% compared with ten years ago, when there were 323 fire-related fatalities. Fire-related fatalities had been on a downward trend since the 1980s but have plateaued in recent years. This year's figure however is the lowest number of fire-related fatalities in the series of statistics.

So there is modest room for congratulation, but these figures are still not good enough. More recently, we have had the worrying student fire at Bolton and the fire in the Travelodge in Brentford. Neither has been fully analysed, but the first indications are that the cladding may have played a part in the first fire and probably did not in the second.

another way, we must design our buildings correctly, build them correctly, and maintain them correctly. We must be particularly vigilant about putting the correct measures in place to remove smoke, which can kill in two ways. It can kill directly, because it is toxic, and it can hamper rescue efforts and ease of escape. We must, in particular, think about the protection of existing buildings. While Grenfell was the most tragic example of a building that became more dangerous throughout its life, most negligence is less dramatic. It includes, for example, breaching of compartmentation by ill-considered minor building works.

It is too easy to concentrate on the important issue of new construction and forget about the vast number of buildings that are already in existence and occupied. These buildings must be maintained correctly and that means that competent people must inspect and work on them to ensure that all elements of the fire protection are working properly. Only when we get everything right, in terms of maintenance as well as initial design and construction, on every building, will we be able to minimise the danger of fire. Then we will save lives and cut damage to properties and disruption to everyday life. We are travelling, broadly, in the right direction, but we must do more.



Chancellor announces £1bn Building Safety Fund for 'all forms' of cladding removal

NEWS: 11/03/20 - 1.38pm by **PETER APPS**

The chancellor has announced a £1bn Building Safety Fund for the removal of dangerous cladding of all forms from high-rise buildings.



Cladding protestors outside parliament last month. (Picture: Lucie Heath).

In his Budget speech today, Rishi Sunak said that a new fund would be established that “goes beyond” aluminium composite material (ACM) cladding and is available for all private and social sector buildings taller than 18m.

The government had previously announced £400m for social housing tower blocks with ACM in 2018 and £200m for the private sector in 2019, but it has come under increasing pressure in recent months to extend the fund to non-ACM buildings.

A guide published by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) indicated that the

fund would cover timber, high-pressure laminate and other cladding materials with a Euroclass fire rating of ‘C’ or below.

However, with the total funding costs for removal work expected to easily top £10bn in the social housing sector alone, it is not yet clear how the government will direct and prioritise the work.

Budget documents made it clear that the £1bn is additional funding on top of the £600m already announced – taking the total pot to £1.6bn.

Announcing the measure, Mr Sunak said: “Two-and-a-half years on, we’re still grappling with the tragic legacy of Grenfell.

Last year we announced £600m to remove aluminium composite material, or ACM, from high rises.

“Today I go further. Expert advice is clear that new public funding must concentrate on removing unsafe materials from high-rise residential buildings. So today I am creating a new Building Safety Fund worth £1bn.

“That new fund will go beyond dealing with ACM to make sure that all unsafe combustible cladding will be removed from every private and social residential building above 18m.”

The MHCLG said it expects social housing providers which are funding removal work to



Rishi Sunak announces £650m to tackle rough sleeping in Budget. [Click here >](#)

Sector gets £12bn for next Affordable Homes Programme. [Click here >](#)

continue to do so without accessing the fund “so we can prioritise this funding on those who cannot afford the cost, creating a barrier to remediation and safety”. It added that the £1.6bn “will be the limit to the government’s funding for remediation”.

Building owners will be required to pursue contractors and warranty providers for compensation, which will be repaid to government to cover the cost of the funding.

“If building owners continue to fail in their responsibility to remediate unsafe cladding systems, despite this additional funding, the government will not hesitate to encourage and support enforcement action through local authorities and fire and rescue services,” a statement said.

Inside Housing’s **End Our Cladding Scandal campaign** called on the government to create a building safety fund not limited to ACM – this announcement marks a major victory in that campaign, which has been run in partnership with resident groups from affected buildings.

Documents released alongside the Budget confirmed that the funding is additional.

It said: “Following the Grenfell tragedy, one of the government’s most important objectives is to ensure residents feel safe and secure in their home. Having taken expert advice, the Budget confirms an additional £1bn to remove unsafe cladding from

residential buildings above 18m, to ensure people feel safe in their homes.”

Spending tables suggested £1.215bn would be spent through the new Building Safety Fund in 2020/21 – appearing to indicate the additional £1bn plus £215m which has not yet been spent through other funds.

A spokesperson for Grenfell United, the group representing the bereaved and survivors of the 2017 fire, said: “Today it seems like a big step has been taken. The

government is finally waking up to the severity of the situation.

“We hope for the first time in many months, people’s anxiety might ease and residents can see an end in sight for the crisis. It’s thanks to residents up and down the country, in social and private housing, who raised their voices. We stood together and made sure we will not be ignored.

“This is just the start. The fund is for buildings over 18m only, not yet for buildings under that. Hard work is needed to make sure buildings are prioritised, the funds get out quickly and work starts immediately. Every building needs a timeline and residents must be listened to and supported throughout the process.”

A spokesperson for the UK Cladding Action Group added: “We welcome and thank the chancellor for factoring the cladding scandal into his Budget. [The scandal has been] a nightmare endured by over half a million British people for too long.

“This crisis was avoidable and has caused an insurmountable amount of stress and anguish for many people. The government always said the original ACM fund was created to quicken the pace of remediation works – but to date, only a handful of eligible buildings have been fully approved for funding... We can only hope the mistakes are not now replicated.”

The Manchester Cladators group called the announcement “a hugely positive step” but added: “Today is a good day but we will continue to pressure government until every single property is safe.”



Nine ACM-clad social housing blocks yet to start remediation work despite promise of government cash. [Click here >](#)

The chancellor has announced a £1bn Building Safety Fund for the removal of dangerous cladding of all forms from high-rise buildings

#ukhousing

Grenfell Inquiry suspended due to coronavirus outbreak

NEWS: 11/03/20 - 1.38pm
by **PETER APPS**

The Grenfell Tower Inquiry has suspended hearings “until further notice” following the escalation in the country’s response to the growing coronavirus crisis.

In a statement yesterday evening, inquiry chair Sir Martin Moore-Bick said that continuing would expose those who were required to attend “to an unacceptable risk of infection”.

He added that the inquiry would give “careful consideration” to the possibility of continuing hearings via video link and would provide a further update in due course.

Questions were raised about the possibility of the inquiry being halted earlier on Monday after it emerged that panel member Thouria Istephan, who considers the evidence alongside Sir Martin, had fallen ill. A statement said that she had “symptoms similar to those of COVID-19”.

The inquiry elected to continue with evidence regardless today and had invited submissions from core participants about the next steps, with an announcement due tomorrow morning. It had indicated it would continue with attendance limited to those who were strictly required.

But following the announcement of a tougher lockdown aimed at slowing the spiralling increase of the disease in Britain, the inquiry elected to halt proceedings.

In his statement Sir Martin said: “In the light of the prime minister’s statement this afternoon, the panel has decided that the inquiry should hold no further hearings for the time being. To do so, even on the basis of limited attendance, would be to expose those whose presence is essential for that purpose, not to mention those whom we wish to call as witnesses, to an unacceptable risk of infection.

“It would also send the wrong signal to the world at large at a time when everyone is being urged to co-operate with measures designed to minimise the effect of the virus.

“We very much regret that it has been necessary to take this step and we shall be



Sir Martin Moore-Bick, inquiry chair

giving careful consideration to whether it is possible to resume hearings using electronic means, but even if that is not possible the work of the inquiry will continue. We shall keep you informed of developments as they occur and I hope that it will not be long before we can continue taking evidence.”

The inquiry, which launched its second phase in the last week of January, has only been operational again for a fortnight, following **a month-long hiatus due to a bid from corporate witnesses for**

protection from prosecution on the basis of their oral evidence.

This was eventually granted but resulted in a month-long break in the evidence.

The latest delay, which could continue for months, raises the prospect of the oral evidence pushing on into 2022 – some five years after the fire. It is not known how long Sir Martin will need to write his Phase Two report, but completing the report for the first phase, which only examined the night of the fire, ran on for 10 months.

Before the suspension, the inquiry **heard evidence from Cate Cooney**, a former employee of fire engineer Exova.