

## **Statement on fire safety in blocks and flats and in homes where external wall insulation has been applied**

Following the terrible fire at Grenfell Tower in London we thought it important to set out what Powys County Council Housing Service is doing in respect of fire safety in our flatted accommodation.

We have a robust series of measures in place but the shocking events in London serve to underline the importance of what we are already doing and demand clear focus from the team. There will inevitably be detailed reports and recommendations coming out of the proposed public enquiry into the fire at Grenfell Tower and we will take those on board and review our policy and practice at that time.

On the day of the horrific fire in Grenfell Tower, there was a routine meeting of the Housing Health and Safety Group. This group discussed the fire and implications for properties owned by Powys County Council. In particular the Group reviewed our use of external cladding. The service confirmed that the insulation material used in our external wall insulation is an enhanced fire retardant expanded polystyrene system, with a render finish applied to the external face. However, the way in which the material is encapsulated on our properties is very different to the way it was reportedly used at Grenfell Tower. The external wall insulation product is fixed to the dwellings with no significant void between the property and insulation, this means there is no continuous void to act as a chimney or oxygen source. The product is encapsulated within a render finish which increases the fire resistance of the insulation system; this external wall insulation system is certified by the British Board of Agrément.

In addition, we can confirm that one of our properties which had been clad in this material experienced a catastrophic fire in the last few months, and whilst the interior of the property was badly damaged, the cladding system resisted the fire and remained undamaged and the fire didn't spread to the adjoining property. This is shown in the pictures below.



It should be noted that the dark marks on the pebble dash are just soot staining



We are reassured of the safety of cladding we have fitted to our properties. At this meeting the Group also discussed the need for clear assessments of fire safety in the planning, commissioning and delivery of major refurbishment works, this will be taken forward by the relevant team.

Our current supplier of insulated render systems has clarified that they complete in-depth fire testing on their EWI systems through the BBA (British Board of Agrément) and the BRE (British Research Establishment), to ensure the systems achieve the highest industry standards and meet current building regulations with regard to fire resistance and spread of flame. The film below shows the product being fire tested.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=13IITMkGAYo>

## **The management of fire safety in blocks of flats owned by Powys County Council**

The current arrangements around fire safety in blocks of flats owned by Powys County Council Housing are as follows:

1. The Service works closely with Mid & West Wales Fire and Rescue Service to ensure we have a robust fire safety management plan in place. There is a Joint Fire Safety group (Housing and Fire Service) that meets regularly to discuss policy and practice around fire safety.
2. The Service has a clear policy for fire safety
3. The Services undertakes periodic fire risk assessments on all of our blocks of flats, based on a risk assessment of each block
4. The Service undertakes periodic visual inspection of all of our blocks
5. The Service attends to maintenance and management issues as they arise
6. The Service have carried out improvements to all of our blocks ensuring fire doors are fitted, blocks are secure, the stairways are clear and well lit, smoke detectors and emergency lighting are maintained where these are fitted.
7. The Service retains a capital budget to carry out installation and updating of communal fire alarms and smoke detectors and emergency lighting in dwellings as recommended by fire risk assessments. We prioritise investment in blocks depending on the level of priority given to the works by the Officer conducting the Fire Risk Assessment survey
8. We advise all tenants and leaseholder living in block of flats which share a communal entrance to leave the block immediately if you are made aware of a fire in another flat in the block
9. The Service assesses our vulnerable tenants, referring them to the Fire Service for home fire safety visits, this is where the Fire Service offer free fire safety advice in the tenant's home
10. Where the Service has tenants with poor mobility we develop a Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan with them and share this with the Fire Service
11. The Service has a "stay-put" policy for residents in blocks of flats who cannot leave the building themselves – this is based upon the advice from the Fire Service. Our flats form fire proof compartments where fire cannot readily spread from room to room and flat to flat. This will give the Fire Service time to safely evacuate tenants.

12. The Service holds periodic estate clean up days to assist tenants in disposing of bulking items of rubbish that might otherwise cause a fire safety hazard.

Finally, it should be noted that we have no high rise blocks (our highest block being 4 stories) and so, neither we nor the Fire Service, face the same challenges as faced by those services involved in the London incident. In addition, **none** of our properties have been clad in Aluminium Composite Material (ACM), the material used in Grenfell Tower.

**What do I do if I have a Hotpoint fridge freezer?**

Early reports suggest that the fire in Grenfell Tower was started by a fault in a Hotpoint fridge freezer. The advice shown below has been copied from the Hotpoint website

Anyone who has a white Hotpoint fridge freezer model number FF175BP or graphite fridge freezer model number FF175BG should register their appliance with the manufacturer to receive any updates.

Generally, the model number is found on a bar code on a sticker behind the salad container in the fridge.

These models were manufactured between March 2006 and July 2009. About 64,000 were sold but it is not known how many are still in use.

Owners should ring 0800 316 3826 or visit <https://www.hotpointservice.co.uk/fridgefreezer>