

www.lancmag.com

October 2017

# Lancashire

& North West magazine



**A natural rejuvenation serum everyone should try**

**Fire Safety tackled by Andrew Harris**

**A Festival of Fashion for you**

**The Johnny Cash Roadshow**

**St. Anne's Food Festival, bigger than ever**

**Meet Carly Paoli**

£2.45





Grenfell Tower after the fire: a tragedy for many and a wake-up call for everybody else. Image courtesy of the Metropolitan Police

Fortunately domestic fires are rare but following the Grenfell Tower tragedy the fear of fire is not. Some risks are peculiar to blocks of flats and 88% of deaths and casualties caused by fire are people who live on their own. Often in flats.

In 2005 the then government reviewed some 80 Acts of Parliament which regulated fire safety and consolidated everything into the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 which came into force in October 2006 and changed how we deal with fire safety. The major change was a radical move from prescriptive codes to the concept of risk assessment. The role of each Fire & Rescue Service was reduced to a legal duty to audit and enforce 'Fire Risk Assessments' and 'General Fire Precautions'. So how does this affect people who live in flats?

All fires are dangerous but blocks of flats are uniquely vulnerable to the spread of fire. Fire safety in flats depends upon the concept of each flat being a compartment with a floor, ceiling, walls and – especially – an entry door which will resist the spread of fire for long enough to enable the fire service to protect the fire escape routes and the rest of the building. This works fine if flat fires can be contained to their 'compartment' provided the fire-resistant integrity of the compartment has been maintained and the building, communal areas and escape routes all comply with the Fire Order 2005 and a competent Fire Risk Assessment. But how would you know?

What are the most common risks? Panel 1 ranks the most common causes of fire. Most are cooking-related or caused by overloaded wiring or faulty electrical appliances. Flat-dwellers are advised to watch and minimise these risks. Panel 2 lists what can be done to achieve the best possible level of fire safety within a flat. These things are up to the person or people living in the flat. The major human failings are tiredness, alcohol, drugs and forgetfulness. Human error is often involved. So beware.

At least as important is what should be done by others to keep you safe in the building you share. You should do the following seven checks regularly although the list cannot be exhaustive:

- All flat entry doors should be fire resistant for 30 minutes with intumescent strips, door closers etc. and kept closed when not being used.

# Fire Safety in Blocks of Flats – What you need to know

By Andrew Harris



Beware doors which are more elegant but not to FD30 standard.

- Likewise, store room doors should be to FD30 standard and closed when not in use
- Be aware of your fire escape route and ensure that it is not obstructed, is free of any combustible material or furniture and has emergency lighting if natural or borrowed light is ever less than one lumen
- All rubbish should be properly stored in refuse bins
- Refuse chutes must have a working device to close if fire breaks out
- Flammable material must not be stored near electrical circuits or fuse boards
- Question your managing agent or

landlord about any new cladding or building alterations – are they safe?

In the recent experience of your columnist many flat dwellers are unclear and curious on three counts. The first of these is guidance about whether to STAY PUT or GET OUT in the event of fire. The National Fire Chiefs Council says “If there is a fire inside a flat or maisonette the advice is to alert all the people in the flat and leave the property and close all doors. They should follow a pre-determined escape plan and if there is a lot of smoke within the flat, people should crawl along the floor where the air should be clearer and the temperature cooler. They should always use the stairs rather than the lift and call 999 as soon as they are in a safe place.”

**Fire in the home is destructive and dangerous. Better to prevent it than fight it**

## THE MOST COMMON CAUSES OF FIRES IN DWELLINGS

- Cooking and items left unattended
- Faulty Electrical Equipment
- Candles
- Careless Disposal of Smoking Materials
- Flammable Items left too close to hot surfaces
- Misuse of flammable substances

*As advised by the Lancashire Fire & Rescue Service*

Panel 1



**ABOVE: Fire is deadly. RIGHT: What fire can do to a kitchen.  
FAR RIGHT: Obstructions and combustible materials: an escape route to die for.**

The advice continues “If there is a fire elsewhere in the building then the structure of the flat – walls, floors and doors – is designed to give appropriate protection. It is important for responsible owners to ensure that high-rise buildings are properly constructed and any refurbishment or maintenance is carried out to compliant standards of fire safety. ***If there is a fire in your building, but not inside your own home, then you are usually safer to stay in your flat unless the heat or smoke from the fire is affecting you. If you STAY PUT you should still immediately call 999 for advice and to ensure that the fire and rescue service along with attending emergency crews have been notified.***”

The NFCC conclude “The advice provided to flat residents can and does change depending on the circumstances that present themselves at what are very dynamic incidents. The advice in this statement is part of a preventative approach to ensure a consistent approach is taken by fire and rescue services to assist flat residents in developing an initial and safe escape plan. Once a 999 call is made and firefighters arrive at the fire then the advice may be reinforced or changed depending on the nature and development of the fire, the building and its residents.”

The second most common query is about what advice

and support is available from each of the 5 Fire and Rescue Services in our region. For over 10 years fire and rescue services have been carrying out interventions in people’s homes to reduce their risk from fire and provide advice on actions to take in the event of fire. These interventions have various names across the 5 fire and rescue services which serve our region but all are based on similar principles. Throughout England about 670,000 such fire safety interventions are delivered annually.

From this successful fire prevention approach the concept of a ‘Safe and Well’ visit has evolved and they will soon be available throughout the north west. ‘Safe and Well’ visits help people who are vulnerable or those with one or more of seven health inequalities or needs: dementia, social isolation, diabetes, healthy homes, fall prevention, home security plus mental health and wellbeing issues. People with any of these are thought to be at higher risk should a fire occur in their home – especially if they live alone. Such visits aim to empower and motivate people to make positive changes to their fire safety, health and wellbeing. If you want to know more about the current Home Fire Safety Checks or Safe and Well Visits or for general advice go to the website of your Fire and Rescue Service or contact them using one of the following phone numbers if you do not have access to the internet:

## ACTION YOU CAN TAKE TO PREVENT FIRES

- Don't overload electrical sockets
- Don't leave your home when washing machines or tumble driers etc are operating
- Always turn off electrical appliances when not in use
- Don't leave cooking materials unattended
- Always dispose of smoking materials safely
- Never put candles near flammable items like curtains, never leave them unattended and always extinguish them
- Close internal (especially kitchen) doors at night
- Install smoke alarms and check them every week

*As advised by the Lancashire Fire & Rescue Service*

Panel 2



Cheshire – 01606 868700

Cumbria – 0800 358 4777

Greater Manchester – 0800 555815

Lancashire – 0800 169 1125 or text 07766 831145

Merseyside – 0800 731 5958

The third most common query is about the availability of smoke alarms. They can be purchased for as little as £10 from good DIY stores and are easily fitted. If you are prevented by age, disability, immobility or poverty from doing this most Fire & Rescue Services provide and fit smoke alarms for little or no

cost. Call your Fire & Rescue Service on the number shown above for more information. Remember – SMOKE ALARMS SAVE LIVES!

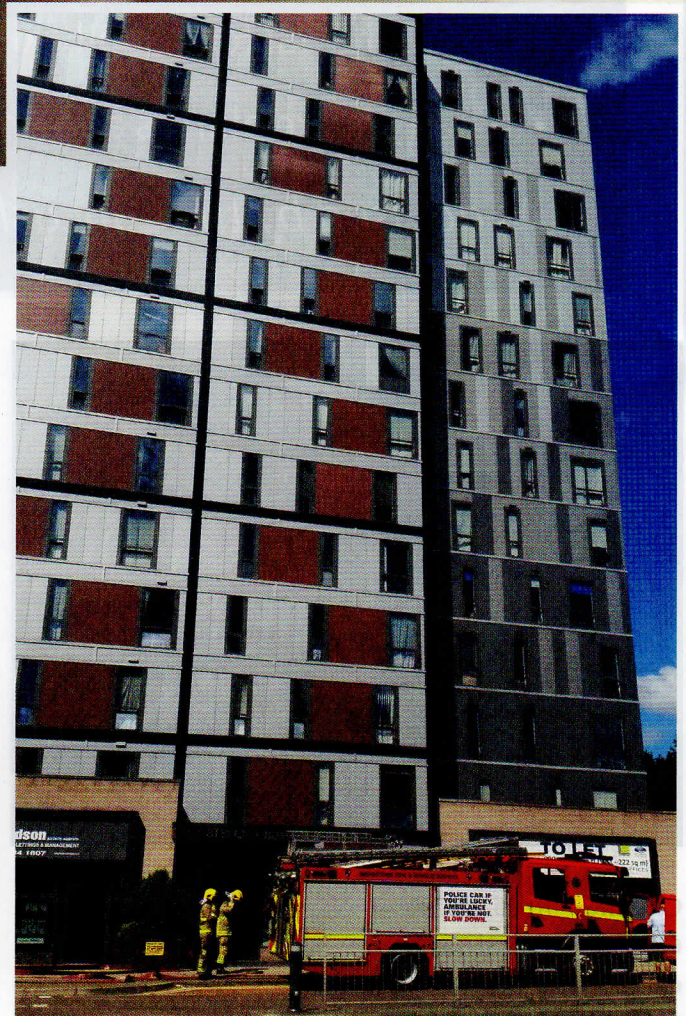
The Grenfell Tower Inquiry and the review of Building Regulations will address many concerns but the experience of your columnist suggests widespread non-compliance with existing fire safety requirements. Inadequate Fire Safety Assessments could result in a return to the more prescriptive pre-2006 regime for residential property. Above all, technology could assist as a new form of smart or intelligent smoke alarm



**MAIN: Firefighters are equipped for this - you aren't. BELOW: A fire inspection: preventing fires is better than fighting them.**

could alert firefighters to a fire in a flat without causing panic and disruption to others. This could be the way forward provided we never see the spread of fire and smoke that caused the tragedy at Grenfell Tower. In the meantime flat residents, managing agents and landlords are urged to follow the advice from the Fire & Rescue Services contained in this article.

**Andrew Harris ([www.andreweharris.co.uk](http://www.andreweharris.co.uk)) gratefully acknowledges the help provided by all 5 Fire & Rescue Services in our region and especially Tony Crook, Mick Duffell and Rachel Ditchfield of Lancashire Fire & Rescue plus Deborah Bamber of the University of Central Lancashire. Unless otherwise acknowledged the pictures are courtesy of the Lancashire and Merseyside Fire & Rescue Services.**



**CORRECTION -** Last month's article 'The UK's Most-Needed Enterprise Zone' wrongly stated that Business Rates Relief will be available until 31st March 2012 with qualifying companies potentially receiving this benefit until 2027. The first date is in fact 31st March 2022. Sorry! AEH.