

Following Advice from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government on Fire Safety

M Fire Risk Assessment Note to Clients 2 External Wall Systems & Flat Entrance Fire Doors Version 1.0 August 2020

Barely a day goes by without External Wall Systems, Balconies and Fire Doors being discussed. With the fire safety landscape changing so quickly, we thought it important to keep you up to speed with our approach to these key issues and provide you with the support and links you might need to successfully manage your buildings.

Introduction

The Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG), has released advice notes for building owners and anyone responsible for or advising on, the fire safety of external wall systems of multi-storey, multi-occupied residential buildings. Important: It should be noted that this advice is for buildings of any height. As part of this advice there is also a section on flat entrance fire doors.

In recent years, there have been radical changes in the fire safety landscape, with more to come in the near future with the introduction of a new Fire Safety Bill. The bill will amend the Fire Safety Order 2005 (FSO) to clarify that the responsible person or duty-holder for multi-occupied, residential buildings must manage and reduce the risk of fire for:

- The structure and external walls of the building, including cladding, balconies and windows
- Entrance doors to individual flats that open into common parts

This note to clients, is provided in order to clarify the scope of fire risk assessment that Cardinus is able to provide. Below, we have provided 3 scenarios with the associated response.

Scope of fire risk assessment – wall systems

To provide clients with as much information as possible, on the nature of external wall surfaces, we will, within our fire risk assessment, provide a simple description of the external walls and in particular, identify the presence of any cladding. This will be achieved by way of a visual observation, supported by any information which is made available from the client. In line with the MHCLG guidance and the expected Fire Safety Bill, this advice and detail will be provided for buildings of any height i.e. not limited to those over 18 metres in height.

Scenarios

1. New instruction for a building, not previously assessed by Cardinus, with no evidence or information provided by the client regarding the presence of external cladding or the build-up of the wall systems.



Response: We can carry out a Type 1* fire risk assessment. If the assessment identifies cladding on the building, or balconies etc. we will recommend that further specific inspections are carried out in line with MHCLG guidance.

2. New or previously visited building instruction, where we are made aware of a failed cladding condition and there has been a recommendation to change the fire evacuation strategy, made by a competent person or with agreement between the fire service and the owner or managing agent for the building.

Response: We can carry out a normal Type 1 fire risk assessment which may or may not assist with recommendations regarding the waking watch and installation of a temporary fire alarm system.

3. New or previously visited building instruction; where we are made aware of a failed cladding condition, but there have not been any recommendations made to date regarding the change of the fire evacuation strategy.

Response: We will recommend that the client employs a specialist Chartered Engineer with suitable experience of fire safety in high-rise residential buildings. This is to decide if the building is effectively safe to be occupied and / or if there is a requirement to change the fire evacuation strategy from 'stay put' to simultaneous evacuation.

Assurance and assessment of flat entrance fire doors

In line with the MHCLG guidance, we will recommend that a specific fire door risk assessment is carried out in certain circumstances. This recommendation will only be appropriate where there are concerns with the existing fire doors. And is not required if there is.

- Test evidence provided by the client and/or;
- The fire doors meet with the guidance contained in Fire safety in purpose-built blocks of flats.

Scope of fire risk assessment – flat entrance fire doors

We will carry out a visual inspection of all common part fire doors and will routinely examine a sample of flat entrance fire doors. In practice, this will only be achievable by knocking on individual resident's doors.

Separately, we will as a matter of course recommend that all fire doors are routinely checked by a competent person contractor every 6 months.

Summary from MHCLG guidance

Flat entrance fire doors leading to a shared or communal area are required to provide fire and smoke protection and are part of a layered approach to most fire strategies for buildings.

- It is important that all fire doors, including the compulsory closers, are routinely maintained by a suitably qualified professional. Residents should be made aware of the importance of a working self-closing device on all fire doors which under any circumstances should not be altered.
- Manufacturers of modern or replacement flat entrance fire doors will have test evidence demonstrating that they meet the performance requirement in Building Regulations guidance for fire resistance and smoke control from both sides of the door.
- It is important to ensure that the specification within the test evidence relates to the doorset being installed.
- Building owners should aim to replace existing timber flat entrance doorsets if they suspect they do not meet the fire or smoke resistance performance contained in the Local Government Association guide "Fire safety in purpose-built blocks of flats". The building owner should use an appropriate risk assessment process to determine how urgently such doors should be replaced.

Definitions

*Type 1 fire risk assessment.

Common parts only (non-destructive)

A Type 1 fire risk assessment is the basic fire risk assessment required for the purpose of satisfying the FSO.

The inspection of the building is non-destructive. But as well as considering the arrangements for means of escape and so forth, the fire risk assessment includes examination of at least a sample of flat entrance doors. It also considers, so far as reasonably practicable, the separating construction between the flats and the common parts without any opening up of construction. However, in this Type of fire risk assessment, entry to flats beyond the area of the flat entrance door, is not involved.

Where there are demountable false ceilings in the common parts, it may be appropriate to lift a sample of readily accessible false ceiling tiles. In addition, it will normally be appropriate to open a sample of service risers, provided access is practicable at the time of inspection.

Unless there is reason to expect serious deficiencies in structural fire protection – such as inadequate compartmentation, or poor fire stopping – a Type 1 inspection will normally be sufficient for most blocks of purpose-built flats. Where doubt exists in relation to these matters, the action plan of a Type 1 fire risk assessment may recommend that one of the other types of fire risk assessment be carried out or that further investigation be carried out by specialists. (However, this should not be a generic recommendation of all Type 1 fire risk assessments; the recommendation should be based on identification of issues that justify reason for doubt.)

Links to MHCLG and Local Government Association guidance

Advice for Building Owners of Multi-storey, Multi-occupied Residential Buildings:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/869532/Building_safety_advice_for_building_owners_including_fire_doors_January_2020.pdf

Annex A – Advice for Building Owners on assurance and assessment of flat entrance fire doors:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/859279/Annex_A_-_Assurance_and_Assessment_of_Fire_Doors_-_January_2020.pdf

Fire safety in purpose-built blocks of flats:

<https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/fire-safety-purpose-built-04b.pdf>

Cardinus' Trusted Partners, FR Consultants, who conduct Type 3 and 4 Fire Risk Assessments, Façade Surveys, EWS1, budgeting, remedial specification, overseeing works, principle designer and lead consultant services: <https://www.frconsultants.co.uk/>