

Advice Note on Balconies on Residential Buildings

This Advice Note provides advice on the risks arising from balconies on residential buildings. This Advice Note is written for building owners, managing agents and residents of residential buildings with multiple dwellings (i.e. blocks of flats), although the principles may also apply to other building types.

1. Summary

- 1.1. Balconies made with combustible materials are a potential source of rapid fire spread on the external wall of residential buildings.
- 1.2. Balconies should not compromise resident safety by providing a means of external fire spread. [Advice Note 14](#) previously issued by the UK Government Safety Expert Panel, advises building owners to ensure they have assessed the risks with regards to external walls. This note clarifies the advice in relation to balconies.
- 1.3. Building owners should be aware of the materials used in the construction of their external wall, including the construction of balconies and the potential for any horizontal and vertical fire spread due to the arrangement of balconies on the external wall. Balconies should be considered as part of any risk assessment undertaken.
- 1.4. Building owners should inform residents about the risks arising from the presence of combustible materials on balconies. They should make clear that smoking, the use of barbecues and storage of flammable property on balconies can increase that risk.

2. Balconies

- 2.1. Balcony fires can spread to adjacent balconies or into the building. If combustible materials have been used in the balcony or external wall system, it is possible that fire may spread rapidly across the façade. The risk is increased if combustible materials are used extensively (i.e. in floors and façades of balconies).
- 2.2. Welsh Government's view supports the UK Government Expert Panel, in that these provisions apply to buildings regardless of height and that building owners need to ensure that any balconies do not compromise resident safety by providing a means of external fire spread.
- 2.3. Existing buildings of all heights may have balconies which have been constructed using combustible materials (excluding escape balconies, which should already have used non-combustible materials).
- 2.4. Building owners should therefore ensure that they understand the materials used in the construction of existing balconies, irrespective of the building

height. Building owners should assess the associated risk of external fire spread and take appropriate action to manage this risk. This should include assessing whether adequate fire protection is in place to resist fire spread.

- 2.5. Where there is doubt over the materials used, or risk presented, building owners should seek professional advice from an appropriately qualified and competent professional (i.e. a fire engineer or construction professional with significant knowledge and experience of fire safety).
- 2.6. Building owners should also ensure that any risks arising from balconies are considered as part of their risk assessment and relevant information provided to residents.
- 2.7. In assessing the level of fire risk from balconies, building owners and their professional advisers will want to consider the extent of use of combustible materials, the geometry of combustible materials in balconies and external walls and whether there are large spans of combustible material which may assist horizontal and/or vertical fire spread.
- 2.8. The fire risk on balconies can also be increased due to the use of balconies for storage, or the unsafe disposal of smoking materials and the misuse of barbecues.
- 2.9. Building owners should have policies in place as to what can and cannot be stored and used on balconies by residents and should review these in the light of the materials used in the balcony construction. They should also communicate with residents to ensure their understanding of these risks.
- 2.10. There have been several incidents of balcony fires which have led to external fire spread. BRE Global published examples of this in their 2016 report "Fire safety issues with balconies" which can be accessed at:
[https://www.bre.co.uk/filelibrary/Fire and Security/FI---Fire-safety-andbalconies-July-16.pdf](https://www.bre.co.uk/filelibrary/Fire%20and%20Security/FI---Fire-safety-andbalconies-July-16.pdf)
- 2.11. The BRE report concluded that *"...managers and risk assessors all need to be mindful of the potential fire risk associated with fires on balconies from their incorporation in to the building..."*. The UK Government Expert Panel supports this advice.
- 2.12. The BRE Global report quoted above also identifies that there are additional risks from materials used to prevent heat loss through thermal bridging that may increase fire spread. Building owners should understand whether these materials are present and consider them as part of their assessment of risk.

3. Resident concerns

- 3.1. Residents with concerns about the fire safety of their premises should contact their managing agent, management company or landlord in the first instance. They should be able to provide them with information on fire safety of the

building and how this is being managed. Such requests should be responded to promptly.

- 3.2. If residents are unable to obtain fire safety information, or believe their concerns are not being addressed appropriately, then there is information on the UK Government website about organisations who can provide support at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/building-safety-programme-other-fire-safetyconcerns>.
- 3.3. Any urgent fire safety concerns should be raised with the local fire and rescue service.