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Webinar Report

Lessons from Grenfell

Thursday 23 September 2021

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'Lessons Learnt for the Built Environment from the Grenfell Tower Fire'

in partnership with the Fire Protection Association



Chair:

Su Butcher, Director of Communications Consultancy, Just Practising Ltd.

Speakers:

Dame Judith Hackitt, DBE, FREng, FICChemE, FCGI, Chair Make UK and former Chair UK HSE.

Howard Passey, Director of Operations, Fire Protection Association.

Terence Short, GFireE, Principal Fire Safety Advisor, City of London Corporation.

Key points:

- When we look at previous crises outside of the built environment it is important to reflect that these incidents led to industry-wide overhauls of regulation and implementation of safer working practices.
- Tragic events do lead all those involved or associated with the affected sector to do a great deal of soul searching.
- Taking the example of the oil and gas industry, tragic events such as Piper Alpha required a serious rethink and culture shift to avoid such an event happening again.
- There is never a place for complacency or lack of focus in process safety.
- Learning lessons is important but when done properly it is never easy.
- Grenfell draws parallels from other major incidents where the real points of failure started well before the critical event.

Lessons we must learn:

- The root cause of failure in Grenfell was a systemic one and the resilience issue is much bigger than any single component.
- We have a system at present that, unless it is changed, does not ensure that our buildings are fit for purpose.
- There is a lack of clarity over who is responsible, a lack of understanding over buildings as complex systems, shockingly poor levels of competence in some places, and a lack of quality assurance.
- There is no doubt that the regulatory system in its current format is not up to standard and huge gaps in oversight persist. All these things require immediate action and change.
- Volumes of rules and guidance only lead to people playing by the rules; it does not lead to people thinking about the real issues.
- We need to ensure quality of design and materials; we need to emphasise responsibilities and we must value the voices of those who operate and use the buildings we design.
- We need the industry to step away from its adversarial and siloed approach to one of much greater cross-sector collaboration.

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- Without leadership and a commitment to doing the right thing within the industry, we will not move forward, and lessons learned will continue to be missed.

A proactive approach:

- As a country we tend to wait for a crisis to happen before we legislate against failure.
- Poor standards of compartmentation persist within our buildings.
- The building materials we have used and continue to use put us at risk.
- In modular buildings we have an issue with ineffective cavity barriers.
- Factors significant in the outbreak of fire are often overlooked in the risk-assessment process, those that result from building design are often missed because they are commonly hidden.
- There is a need for greater rigor in ensuring competency across the design, build and managed phases over a building's lifetime. This competency must be maintained, renewed and retained over a longer timeline than it is currently.
- In developing resilience in the built environment we need to consider the issues more widely than seeing buildings as physical assets.

Built-environment resilience in practice:

- We cannot rely on regulation to solve the problem; we must do more than what the minimum requirements suggest.
- Regulations have caveats which can be exploited.
- Fire risk is ever present and we need to manage proactively this risk.
- There is a multitude of risk factors facing the built environment and it is unlikely that all will be picked up by the designers.
- We need to challenge behaviours across the built environment to be resilient.

Key considerations:

- It is important to realise this is a problem that extends beyond the UK and we should learn from one another in the regulatory environment.
- All industries should get better at learning from one another with regards to fire safety and avoid reinventing the wheel in siloes.

A link to the webinar recording can be found [here](#).

Speakers' biographies:

Su Butcher

After training as an architect, Su Butcher spent much of her career in management before founding her consultancy Just Practising Ltd, which helps product manufacturers use digital information management and communications strategies to face the challenges of a 21st Century construction industry. Su sits on the Institute of Engineering Technology's Built Environment Panel and leads the editorial board of the panel's new white paper, Digitisation for construction product manufacturers: a plain language guide. She is also project manager for BIM for Housing Associations, a National Housing Federation



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supported collaborative initiative to support housing associations to implement digital asset management.

Dame Judith Hackitt

Dame Judith Hackitt was the Chair of the Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety and is Chair of manufacturing trade body Make UK (formerly EEF and Chair of Enginuity (formerly SEMTA). She is also a Fellow and Trustee of the Royal Academy of Engineering. Dame Judith also holds non-executive positions at HS2 Ltd and High Vale Manufacturing Catapult. An engineer by profession, Dame Judith holds a degree in chemical engineering from Imperial College, London and is a former President of IChemE. She was Chair of the UK regulator the Health and Safety Executive for a decade until 2016.

Howard Passey

Howard trained formally as a land surveyor spending eight years in the construction industry before joining the Fire Protection Association as a Training/Information Officer in 1992. He has a BEng (Hons) in Fire Engineering and is a Member of the Institution of Fire Engineers (IFE), a Fellow of the Institute of Fire Safety Managers (IFSM) and registered on the Nationally Accredited Fire Risk Assessors Register (NFRAR). He has spent considerable time in our fire advisory division and is among our most experienced and respected fire risk assessors; helping clients with complex and varied projects including fire safety audits, fire strategy development and reviews, inspections and risk assessments. Howard's varied and thorough knowledge of the industry makes him perfectly placed as our Director of Operations, ensuring the integrity of our work.

Terence Short

Terence is the Principal Fire Advisor for the City of London Corporation. After a multi-disciplined career with the London Fire Brigade. He joined the City of London four years ago. He is responsible for the fire safety in the most diverse property portfolio of the oldest government body in the world, including Barbican, the largest entertainment centre in Europe, its own, schools, universities, social housing, 12,000 acres of parkland and 12 major historic building, it supplies the local authority's functions and policing services for the financial and commercial heart of Britain, the 'Square Mile'. He sits on the London Council representing London's 33 London boroughs as a fire advisor post Grenfell.

