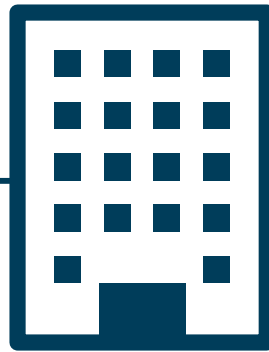


**Technical
Bulletin**



Fire Industry Association



**The Status of PAS 79-2 & LGA Fire safety in
purpose-built blocks of flats guide.**

PAS 79-2 (Fire risk assessment – Housing – Code of practice)

History:

PAS 79-2 was originally published in December 2020. It was produced at the request of the housing sector, who considered that there was a need for dedicated guidance on fire risk assessments for housing premises, and for a “tailor-made” template on which to record the significant findings of these fire risk assessments. As in the case of every PAS, it was independently authored, with the work of the technical authors overseen by a steering group of stakeholders, one of which was, in the case of PAS 79-2, the FIA.

Following publication, BSI received a complaint regarding the text of PAS 79-2 in relation to evacuation of disabled people from blocks of flats. There was also considerable misleading misinformation on certain social media regarding the guidance of PAS 79-2 on this subject; for example, it was suggested by a minority on social media that PAS 79-2 encouraged users of the PAS to ignore the needs of disabled people in the event of fire. In fact, for example, PAS 79-2 advised that arrangements need to be made for the provision of contact numbers for persons with whom disabled people can discuss and plan evacuation in the event of fire.

As a result of this complaint, BSI suspended PAS 79-2 from sale, pending consideration of the complaint. It was made clear to BSI, at the most senior level, that the action taken by BSI to suspend PAS 79-2 from sale was deprecated by the FIA, who strongly recommended that it was restored for sale, as a code of practice that was greatly needed to support the safety of residents in blocks of flats, HMOs and sheltered housing; many such premises are those in which residents are most vulnerable to fire. The same view was expressed to BSI by the Institute of Fire Safety Managers.

In the meantime, BSI had instructed the original steering group responsible for PAS 79-2 (expanded in stakeholders) to review all text within PAS 79-2 on evacuation of disabled people from blocks of flats in the event of fire. The minority view on the steering group precluded achievement of consensus.

Current situation:

As a result of the above history, BSI have now permanently withdrawn PAS 79-2, pending conversion of the PAS into a full British Standard. As an interim measure, BSI have made the original PAS 79-2 available for download, free of charge, from the BSI website¹. However, all references to disabled people have been redacted from the document, including the above advice regarding the need to provide disabled people with a facility to discuss their evacuation in the event of fire; redacting this advice is, in the opinion of the FIA, to the detriment of the fire safety of disabled people in multi-occupied residential premises, such as blocks of flats.

This unprecedented situation has caused significant confusion within the fire safety and housing sectors. A BSI publication is normally withdrawn when it is obsolete or incorrect. While the guidance on disabled evacuation may be contentious, in the opinion of the FIA, all other guidance and recommendations within PAS 79-2 are uncontroversial, valid and maintain currency, though there are forthcoming changes to fire safety legislation that will need to be taken into account by users.

FIA position:

This technical bulletin has been produced by FIA to assist members who may experience the confusion described above.

For avoidance of doubt, the FIA strongly support the use of the downloadable version of PAS 79-2 for guidance and recommendations on carrying out fire risk assessments for housing premises.

With regard to disabled evacuation, given that all guidance on this matter has been redacted from the downloadable version, it will be for fire risk assessors to use their own judgement in respect of this matter,

¹ <https://www.bsigroup.com/en-GB/standards/pas-79-22020/>

and no guidance is available at this time. Government have consulted the public on the matter Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans (PEEPs) for disabled people in high-rise blocks of flats. At the time of writing this technical bulletin, Government have not given any indication as to the outcome of this consultation.

Members engaged in fire risk assessment are advised to remain alert to all further developments in this respect and to forthcoming changes in relevant legislation.

As and when appropriate, this technical bulletin will be updated to assist in this respect.

“Fire safety in purpose-built blocks of flats”

History:

The guidance document bearing the above heading was published in 2011 as the result of the serious fire at Lakanal House, London. It was hosted on the website of the Local Government Association (LGA). It was generally regarded within the fire safety and housing sectors as the definitive guidance to follow for those engaged in fire safety management, fire risk assessment, and enforcement of legislative requirements in respect of fire safety in existing purpose-built blocks of flats. Following the fire at Grenfell Tower in 2017, the relevant government minister advocated its use to ensure the safety of residents in purpose-built blocks of flats.

In 2021, the LGA took the view, without consultation with the fire sector, that the Guide was now out of date as a result of changes in government policy and regulation. Accordingly, they removed the Guide from their website. In fact, the view of the FIA is that the Guide is extremely comprehensive and contains much valuable information on fire safety in purpose-built blocks of flats that is of great value to fire risk assessors, but is not available elsewhere.

Accordingly, the FIA, on behalf of its members, particularly those engaged in fire risk assessment, made strong representations to the Home Office advocating that the Guide be hosted as soon as possible on the Home Office website. Quite independently, on behalf of its members, the Institute of Fire Safety Managers made very similar representations. In a letter to the minister, the IFSM described the withdrawal of the Guide by LGA as “a great loss to the fire industry and our members”. The IFSM stated that the Guide was “one of the most widely used and appreciated guidance documents for fire safety specialists”.

Current situation:

The Guide is now hosted on the Home Office section of the Government website (see URL in the references at the end of this technical bulletin). Much as in the case of PAS 79-2, three paragraphs dealing with evacuation of vulnerable people have been redacted, pending analysis of responses to the government consultation on PEEPS.

FIA position:

FIA advise members to continue to use this Guide and concur with the IFSM as to the value of its content to all those involved with fire safety in purpose-built blocks of flats. Again, members should use their judgement to ensure that fire safety for disabled people is adequately addressed.

Notwithstanding comments on the LGA website regarding changes to government legislation, regulation and policy, in fact, such changes are, at the time of the drafting of this technical bulletin, still awaited.

While the Fire Safety Act received the royal assent in April 2021, it has not yet been brought into force at this time, but members should remain alert to it coming into force, and to new regulations that will be brought into force to implement the recommendations of Phase 1 of the Public Inquiry into the Grenfell Tower disaster.

As one major effect of the Fire Safety Act 2021 will be, in effect, an extension of scope of the Fire Safety Order to include external wall construction and associated attachments (such as balconies), the FIA guidance on the issue of cladding and external wall construction in fire risk assessments for multi-occupied residents will be updated as soon as practicable after the Act comes into force.

Sources:

PAS 79-2 <https://www.bsigroup.com/en-GB/standards/pas-79-22020/>

The LGA Fire safety in purpose-built blocks of flats guide

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fire-safety-in-purpose-built-blocks-of-flats>



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