

# DR. ZZEUS



**IN THIS REGULAR COLUMN, 'DR. ZZEUS' TOM BROOKES, MD OF ZZEUS TRAINING AND CHAIRMAN OF THE FSA, WILL ANSWER YOUR QUESTIONS RELATED TO FIRE SAFETY COMPLIANCE.**

## **I've been told there's a new fire alarm standard evacuation in blocks of flats like Grenfell. Is this a legal requirement?**

Following the Grenfell Tower fire, many things had to change in the construction and management of high-rise residential buildings. BS 8629:2019 is the new standard that sets out recommendations for Evacuation Alert Systems (EAS), to be used by the Fire & Rescue Service (FRS) in the event of emergencies in apartment blocks. The standard covers the design, installation, commissioning and maintenance of evacuation alert systems for use by the Fire & Rescue Service in buildings containing flats.

### **What is an evacuation alert system?**

An evacuation alert system is an alert warning system operated by a control panel inside the entrance of an apartment block for use by the FRS when they attend an emergency.

Every flat hallway or the room onto which the flat entrance door opens must be fitted with an alarm sounder and visual or tactile devices should be fitted to the system for alerting the deaf or hard of hearing. An evacuation alert



must be clearly distinguishable from any other alarm signal and give a clear warning of the need to evacuate. The alert sound pressure level must be at least 85dB(A) at bedroom doors and 60dB(A) in the principal habitable room.

### **Is it a legal requirement?**

In Scotland, the Domestic Technical Handbook Clause 2.14.8 states that "For blocks of flats with a storey located at a height of more than 18 m above ground level, an evacuation alert system should be provided to allow the FRS to initiate an evacuation signal within each flat".

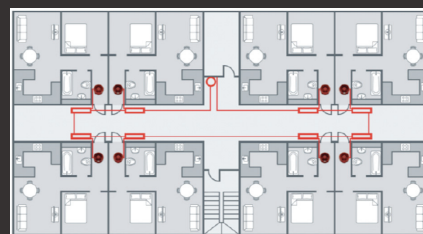
This requirement is also stated in specific building regulations. While it isn't a legal requirement in the UK yet, the Grenfell Phase 1 report recommends that such systems be installed in all new and existing blocks of flats.

BS 8629 allows the use of radio or wired technology. It is predicted that radio systems would be more suitable for retrofitting into existing buildings and that wired systems would be more viable over the life of the building.

### **Why is BS 8629: 2019 necessary?**

As the tragedy at Grenfell proved, managing an evacuation in blocks of flats is a complex process. The 'stay put' policy recommended previously considered that in the event of a fire, tower block inhabitants were safer staying in their flats while the fire was attacked and contained.

This would control the risk of chaos caused by a mass, uncontrolled



evacuation. It was thought firefighters were better deployed tackling the blaze than individually knocking on the doors of flats to organise a safe exit from the building.

'Stay put' is no longer the best advice in many blocks, though where flats are properly fire-rated this containment policy is sensible. In the case of Grenfell, this advice has been cited as a contributing aspect to the tragedy as previous renovations had compromised the capability of flats to remain protected from the spread of fire. In this case, the evacuation alert system gives the FRS an option to fully or partially evacuate a tower block, without potentially wasting valuable time knocking on the doors of flats.

**DO YOU HAVE A QUESTION YOU'D LIKE ANSWERED?**  
EMAIL YOUR QUERIES TO:  
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