

Construction professionals believe fire safety training remains 'inadequate' post-Grenfell

February 14 2020



Credit: Birmingham City University

A third of construction professionals believe the industry still has 'inadequate' knowledge and training around fire safety in the wake of the Grenfell Tower disaster, new research has found.

A study carried out by Iman Farah Mohamed, a Quantity Surveying student at Birmingham City University, looked at industry views on [fire safety](#) following the tragic incident in June 2017, which saw 72 people lose their lives and more than 70 others injured.

It found that most professionals think "knowledge surrounding fire safety in the [construction industry](#)" is inadequate, while the majority also believe higher education institutions need to do more to educate construction students on fire safety before they enter the sector.

The research, which surveyed dozens of people working in construction professions and interviewed one expert directly involved with the Grenfell inquiry, also raised concerns around [fire evacuation procedures](#) in UK hospitals.

One respondent said:

"Current building regulations are compliant but I'm not sure if they're good enough. Interestingly there are no specific building regulations for mass evacuations and having spoken to fire services, they are frightened about hospital fires as the patients are not always mobile, making evacuation difficult."

The paper, which has been published in the International Journal of Building Pathology and Adaptation, suggests that specific roles should be

created dedicated to fire safety, or that existing staff members are given the issue as a key responsibility.

It also recommends that higher education institutions encompass fire safety training in their courses, to ensure the next generation of construction professionals have the skills needed to prevent future disasters from happening.

The report also found that:

- There has been an increased awareness of fire safety concerns in the profession since the Grenfell fire
- There are concerns that the UK hospitals may struggle to evacuate immobile patients in the event of a fire
- Many believe the current fire safety regulations are 'not fit for purpose'
- 37 percent of those surveyed believe industry knowledge on fire safety is 'inadequate'
- Only 28 percent of respondents believe university curricula provide sufficient education on fire-proofing buildings
- 50 percent thought communication between residents and constructors around fire safety should be formalized
- New roles should be created to prioritise fire safety or this responsibility should be a requirement of existing jobs such as facilities managers
- Respondents were conflicted on whether race and class played a role in allowing the neglect which led to the tragedy at Grenfell.

Responders to the research highlighted concerns with the sector's approach to fire safety in the wake of the Grenfell Tower fire with one saying:

"It is not expected that fire could spread externally as there is a mind-set

that fire risk is unlikely outside the facade of the building."

One respondent also challenged higher education institutions to do more and said a focus on driving profits was currently taking precedent over developing the skills needed to keep residents safe:

"Educational institutions have drifted from equipping students with detailed knowledge and they now just focus on making money. Standards of education are now severely compromised as there many students entering the industry without knowledge. This explains the poor selection and compromise on building materials. Gone are the years of durability and safety. It's all money."

Iman Farah Mohamed who wrote the paper said: "The research showed that there remains some concern in the construction industry around the knowledge and training provided in relation to fire safety.

"Grenfell was a major incident which brought the issue to the front of people's minds, but while the awareness in the industry has increased, most professionals want to see more from the sector and higher education providers to prioritize fire [safety](#).

"The recommendations suggest how we can make sure professionals of the future are equipped with the knowledge they need to prevent a tragedy like this in the future, and that regulations and guidelines are updated to add a much needed extra layer of protection."

Recommendations:

- Specialist training be made available to workers across the sector
- Visiting lecturers and specialist practitioners, such as [fire safety](#) engineers, should form part of higher education construction courses

- New regulations should be introduced to protect against future disasters based on building materials or practices
- Funding should be made available to ensure professionals are equipped with the knowledge they need.

More information: Iman Farah Mohamed et al. An investigation into the construction industry's view on fire prevention in high-rise buildings post Grenfell, *International Journal of Building Pathology and Adaptation* (2019). [DOI: 10.1108/IJBPA-05-2019-0048](https://doi.org/10.1108/IJBPA-05-2019-0048)

Provided by Birmingham City University

Citation: Construction professionals believe fire safety training remains 'inadequate' post-Grenfell (2020, February 14) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2020-02-professionals-safety-inadequate-post-grenfell.html>

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