



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

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Welsh Government
Consultation response form

Amendments to Part B (Fire Safety) of the Building Regulations and associated statutory guidance documents, including a call for evidence

Date of issue: 17 October 2023
Action required: Responses by 09 January 2024

Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg hefyd / This document is also available in Welsh
Rydym yn croesawu gohebiaeth a galwadau ffôn yn Gymraeg / We welcome correspondence and telephone calls in Welsh

This consultation seeks views on proposals to:

- Amend the ban of the use of combustible materials in and on external walls of buildings, including building types covered, attachments such as blinds, shutters and awnings, list of exemptions, and a proposal to specifically ban the use of metal composite panels in and on the external walls of all buildings
- Setting limits on the use of combustible materials on certain buildings over 11m through Approved Document B
- Introduce Evacuation Alert System (EAS) in accordance with BS 8629 in all new blocks of flats (Purpose group 1(a)) with a floor 18m or more above ground level
- Introduce Secure Information Boxes in all new blocks of flats with a floor of 11m or more above ground level
- Introduce floor identification and flat wayfinding signage within blocks of flats with a floor of 11m or more above ground level
- An amendment regarding referencing of BS EN 13501 and BS 476 fire classifications used in Approved Document B (AD B) and amend regulations 6 and 7 of the Building Regulations 2010 to permit the use of materials achieving the class A2fl-s1 or A1fl
- Call for evidence over the number of stairs in buildings and the removal of all references to the BS 476 fire classifications from AD B

You can email your response to the questions in this consultation to:

enquiries.brconstruction@gov.wales

If you are responding in writing, please make it clear which consultation and which questions you are responding to:

Amendments to Part B (Fire Safety) of the Building Regulations and associated statutory guidance documents, including a call for evidence.

Written responses should be sent to:

Building Regulations, Welsh Government, Cathays Park, Cardiff, CF10 3NQ

If you have any queries on this consultation, please email:

enquiries.brconstruction@gov.wales or telephone: 0300 062 8144.

Data Protection

Any response you send us will be seen in full by Welsh Government staff dealing with the issues which this consultation is about. It may also be seen by other Welsh Government staff to help them plan future consultations.

The Welsh Government intends to publish a summary of the responses to this document. We may also publish responses in full. Normally, the name and address (or part of the address) of the person or organisation who sent the response are published with the response. This helps to show that the consultation was carried out properly. If you do not want your name or address published, please tick the box below. We will then blank them out.

Names or addresses we blank out might still get published later, though we do not think this would happen very often. The Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 allow the public to ask to see information held by many public bodies, including the Welsh Government. This includes information which has not been published. However, the law also allows us to withhold information in some circumstances. If anyone asks to see information we have withheld, we will have to decide whether to release it or not. If someone has asked for their name and address not to be published, that is an important fact we would take into account. However, there might sometimes be important reasons why we would have to reveal someone's name and address, even though they have asked for them not to be published. We would get in touch with the person and ask their views before we finally decided to reveal the information.

Confidentiality

Responses to consultations may be made public on the internet or in a report.

If you do not want your name and address to be shown on any documents we produce please indicate here

CONSULTATION FORM

Amendments to statutory guidance	
Date:	
Your Name:	Nick Coombe
Your Position <i>(if applicable)</i> :	Head of Protection
Your Organisation <i>(if applicable)</i> :	National Fire Chiefs Council
Email / Telephone Number:	Nicholas.coombe@nfcc.org.uk
Your address:	71-75 Shelton Street, Covent Garden, London, United Kingdom, WC2H 9JQ

Type of Organisation: Choose one of the following:	Select one
• Builder/Developer	
• Manufacturer	
• Designer/Engineer/Surveyor	
• Local Authority Building Control	
• Approved Inspector Building Control	
• Access Consultant	
• Occupational Therapist	
• Disabled People's Organisation	
• Facilities Manager	
• Retailer	
• Construction Professional	
• Property Manager/Landlord	
• Landlord Representative Organisation	
• Changing Places User/Carer	
• Parent/Carer	
• Charity	
• Campaigner or Lobby Group	
• Other Interested Party (please specify)	X (Fire service representative organisation)

Part 1

Combustible cladding ban proposals

Changing the building types

		Yes	No	Unsure
Q1	Do you agree that hotels, hostels and boarding houses, as referenced within the definition of room for residential purposes in regulation 2, should now be included within regulation 7(4) of the Building Regulations 2010, and therefore subject to the ban?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Agree.

Notwithstanding existing requirements for fire breaks and cavity barriers, the ban on the use of combustible materials in and on the external walls of many forms of residential accommodation introduced through Regulation 7 was a significant step in reducing the risk of external fire spread on buildings that provide sleeping accommodation.

The types of residential accommodation covered by Regulation 7 currently exclude hotels, hostels, and boarding houses. It is recognised that the original decision for this exemption was likely based on the understanding that these types of buildings generally have greater levels of on-site management and operate simultaneous evacuations, along with the fact that a good risk assessment undertaken by a competent assessor would ensure the suitability of this method of evacuation if management were effective and fire safety measures implemented. Design guidance for these buildings also recommends additional fire protection measures that aren't necessarily required in blocks of flats such as multiple routes of escape and fire detection and alarm systems.

However, these premises also introduce additional risk factors when compared to the buildings already covered by Regulation 7 in that they provide sleeping accommodation to persons who would be considered unfamiliar with the premises. Despite the expectation that a simultaneous evacuation strategy will be in place, evacuation times will still be significantly greater than in a building where everybody would be awake and alert.

Simultaneous evacuation of large, complex buildings relies on effective management, an issue that is not addressed by the Building Regulations, which are only focused on the design and construction of the building. Hotels are increasingly relying on low numbers of onsite staff, or sometimes none at all. Furthermore, any on-site staff may be limited to maintenance/cleaning personnel in the building for a short period and who

are not intended, or trained, to support guests in an evacuation. These examples don't meet the management assumptions in the Building Regulations, but buildings are being designed to function this way, nonetheless.

Additionally, hotels, hostels, 'aparthotels', and boarding houses (among other building types) are being increasingly used as temporary accommodations for asylum seekers, refugees, and homeless people, as well as being used during national emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Existing fire safety measures designed for hotels when used as 'traditional' hotels (i.e., guests staying for a couple of nights with appropriately trained staff and management) may no longer be suitable in these instances. Our experience with the Home Office Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) demonstrated that in these circumstances the hotel rooms essentially become private dwellings, albeit temporarily. This adds additional complexity to the fire safety status of the building as there is no requirement to apply a 'change of use' status unless a certain percentage of the building is under a change of use over a prescribed set of time. If a change of use is applicable, the building changes to mirror that of a residential building for the purposes of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.

In the ARAP example, hotel staff were not expected to provide assistance in the same manner as they would in a 'traditional' hotel during an emergency, and assistance could be provided externally by the Government or private companies, and in some instances not provided at all. This assistance is not extended to the same extent in other hotels used for asylum seekers or homeless people, nor in aparthotels. In these instances, an extension of the combustible cladding ban to hotels, hostels, and boarding houses can only be of value from a fire safety perspective.

Furthermore, we are seeing the development of new buildings moving away from the guidance that has traditionally underpinned their design. For example, the guidance in Approved Document B (ADB) requires hotels, hostels, and boarding houses to be provided with at least two staircases. Increasingly, these buildings are designed using the guidance for blocks of flats wherein single staircases are acceptable. When taken alongside the issues in providing effective building management, this increases the risk to occupants further.

Many hotels have already been remediated as some Local Authorities ended up submitting information as part of the ACM cladding data request in the immediate aftermath of the Grenfell Tower fire. Having this information meant that it needed to be acted on. It would be logical to implement this proposal and ensure that all hotels are treated equally.

Hostels, Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMO), Exempt Accommodation, and boarding houses have additional risks in terms of other potential dependencies of occupants which may increase their vulnerability and/or ability to react in a fire situation. While

these are often low-rise, tall hostels/boarding houses can and do exist and should therefore be included in the ban. Given the blurring of lines between the various 'residential' purpose groups and the gaming of guidance within ADB, NFCC would support the proposal to amend Regulation 7 to incorporate hotels, hostels, and boarding houses.

Q2	Should any other building types be included within the scope of the ban?	Yes	No	Unsure
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Yes.

The consultation states: "there is a need to change the scope of the ban to cover all additional building types" and yet the only proposal is to extend the ban to include hotels, hostels, and boarding houses.

The functional requirement B4 of Schedule 1 of the Building Regulations states: "The external walls of the building shall adequately resist the spread of fire over the walls and from one building to another having regard to the height, use, and position of the building."

In some cases, the use of combustible materials in construction may already go against the principles of this functional requirement. To consider how 'adequate' the resistance to fire spread is, in addition to the height and position of the buildings, we consider the 'use' of the building should consider a number of factors such as the relationship between:

- the building layout and purpose group, and
- the occupants who use the building, and
- the chosen evacuation plan.

So, the ban should also be extended to include any buildings where a risk of fire spread on the external envelope of the building would impact the evacuation strategy and therefore affect the safety of occupants. This includes (but is not limited to) buildings where people may be incapable of independent escape, such as care homes, regardless of height.

NFCC believes the ban on combustible materials in and on external walls should also be extended to all school buildings. Over the past couple of years, through the COVID pandemic, and more recently during the reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete crisis, the importance of schools as a community asset and the level of disruption that the loss of a school creates has been repeatedly highlighted. Permitting only non-

combustible materials in the construction of external walls will therefore help prevent the loss of a school from fire.

In non-residential buildings, based on height alone, ADB currently only requires that all floors be compartment floors in buildings over 30m. Requirements for internal fire spread (i.e., compartmentation) as part of B3 of the Building Regulations also protect against the risk of external fire spread under B4. This means that, in buildings where this is no requirement for compartment floors, there may be no requirement for protection measures designed to inhibit fire spread on external walls (such as cavity barriers). Whilst this is a separate technical matter that should also be reviewed, banning the use of combustible materials in the external walls will help mitigate the fire risk that these arrangements create.

Regardless of the type of building, where extensive combustible materials are allowed in construction, it is foreseeable that external walls could become involved in a fire. In the event of a fire involving the external wall, there will be an expectation that fire and rescue services (FRSs) undertake firefighting on and in the building. Whilst FRSs have equipment and procedures in place to tackle fires from the inside of a building, there are obvious practical challenges in tackling a fire very high up on or in the external walls. B5 of the Building Regulations addresses aspects of firefighting access; however, it is easily undermined where the construction of the wall could support external fires that FRSs would have significant difficulty extinguishing.

Setting limits on combustible materials on certain buildings 11m and above

		Yes	No	Unsure
Q3	Do you agree that the amendment to Approved Document B to set limits on certain combustible products should be set for buildings with a storey 11-18m (see Diagram C6, Appendix C in Approved Document B Vol. 2)?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q3a	Is there an alternative lower height threshold that should be considered?			

NFCC agrees with the proposals to restrict the use of combustible cladding and insulation in residential buildings between 11m and 18m. Restricting the combustibility of these materials, albeit in guidance rather than legislation, represents a significant safety improvement, and we support the scope being expanded to incorporate all types of residential buildings.

The wording of the proposals means the structure of the building would fall outside the scope of the changes thereby permitting the use of combustible structural elements. NFCC acknowledges this is likely an intentional decision to support the continued use of timber in construction. NFCC holds separate concerns around the use of combustible structures in buildings with a stay-put strategy although these are not primarily concerned with the issue of external fire spread.

Whilst 11m represents a simple threshold for the application of the proposed new requirements, the risk of external fire spread isn't solely determined by the height of a building. In all residential buildings, depending on the overall size, layout, and occupancy, combustible cladding and insulation on some buildings under 11m can represent a significantly greater risk than its inclusion on some buildings which may be over 11m.

It is noted that outside of the functional requirements of Building Regulations, ADB does not provide specific performance requirements for limiting external fire spread on buildings under 11m or where they are located away from the relevant boundary. Regardless of the final decision for the height covered by the specific proposals in this question, there needs to be additional guidance in place to limit the risk of external fire spread in all residential buildings.

Metal Composite Materials

		Yes	No	Unsure
Q4	Do you agree that metal composite panels with a polyethylene core should be banned from being used in external wall construction of any building regardless of height or purpose? If no, why not?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Yes.

While NFCC fully supports the complete ban of the most combustible types of materials in all buildings to limit the greatest risk of external fire spread, we do not feel that the banning of a single product (i.e. Aluminium Composite Material (ACM) with a polyethylene core) is the most effective way of achieving this. If this type of ACM was banned, this combustible product might be replaced with an alternative but equally combustible product if caution isn't applied, thereby undermining the intent of this proposal.

Accordingly, where a complete ban is being appraised, consideration should be given to any materials that might have similar fire characteristics (e.g. calorific value). This approach would also represent a more effective method of futureproofing against

potential new products that may be developed and used in the construction of external walls.

Q5	If their use was to be restricted, do you agree with the proposed definition?	Yes	No	Unsure
		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

NFCC acknowledges that the proposed definition aligns with similar definitions across the UK and supports a consistent standard of safety regardless of location.

NFCC is unclear on the suitability of a gross calorific value of 35 MJ/kg as an acceptable limit for material within an ACM panel to be used in the construction of an external wall. It is unclear why the definition limits the thickness of the panel to no more than 10mm. Whilst this may be reflective of the typical dimensions of an ACM panel, it would appear to create a potential loophole whereby ACM over 10mm thick with a highly combustible core would still be permitted.

Attachments

Q6	Do you agree that solar shading products need to achieve class A2-s1, d0 or A1?	Yes	No	Unsure
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Agree.

We have previously recommended the use of materials used in building attachments be limited to class A2-s1, d0. Solar shading products can take many forms, and NFCC is not aware of any guidance about their size or position, or how they otherwise interact with the external wall. Accordingly, combustible solar shading products could greatly exaggerate the risk of external fire spread thereby completely undermining what Regulation 7 is otherwise intended to achieve.

Q7	Do you agree with the proposed definition of solar shading products? If no, what other definition would you propose and why?	Yes	No	Unsure
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

NFCC has no objections to the definition of solar shading products which mirrors the wording used in guidance in other parts of the UK. Whilst the intent of this definition is

clear, our only observation would be whether the wording would be robust enough to ensure products primarily intended to provide shading for an external area of a building, such as a balcony, as opposed to “*reducing heat gain within the building*” would also be covered by this.

Q8	Do you agree with our proposal to exempt awnings at ground level?	Yes	No	Unsure
		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Awnings are different from other exempt components under Regulation 7 in that they are likely to be geometrically large, and they will not be encapsulated by the external wall construction. In that regard, they create a genuine risk of vertical fire spread, particularly if they are positioned close to a balcony or openable window above.

To allow retractable awnings to be exempted there would need to be evidence of control of such installations by the Responsible Person (RP) under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (FSO). While there is an expectation under the FSO that RPs need to cooperate and coordinate, tension can arise where the safety of persons under the control of one RP is impacted by a risk originating from an area under the control of a different RP. This could be particularly difficult to manage if the risk posed by the awning is dependent on, for example, the items a resident keeps on their balcony. A potential restriction might be that the retractable awnings may be exempted in the case where there is no balcony, or openable windows within a certain distance above.

Although an issue regardless of height, a fire involving an awning could also have a direct impact on the means of escape of buildings. The primary entrance (and exit) for occupants of flats above commercial premises is often located adjacent to or underneath the awning serving the commercial premises.

If awnings on the ground floor were to be exempt because they can't meet the performance requirements prescribed in Regulation 7, then recognising the potential risk they still present, the guidance in ADB should still be updated which includes establishing an appropriate minimum standard.

Q9	Are there other additional components used as attachments to external walls which should be included within the ban as defined by regulation 2(6)(b)?	Yes	No	Unsure
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Yes.

NFCC is not clear on the extent to which Regulation 7 addresses our concerns around external fire spread on green/living walls. Whether they are considered as part of the external wall construction or an attachment will likely depend on the design specifics and is open for discussion, however, we believe it is an issue that should be specifically addressed.

Exemptions

Q10	Do you agree with the exemption of fibre optic cables from the ban?	Yes	No	Unsure
		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

NFCC is not best placed to answer this question. Those with more experience and knowledge in this area will be able to provide more comprehensive details.

Q11	Which components, if any, do you consider should no longer be included in the list of exemptions in regulation 7(3) and why?
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NFCC is not aware of any issues with the components currently listed in regulation 7(3) however we recommend that those with more experience and knowledge in this area are consulted.

Q12	Which additional components, if any, should be included in the list of exemptions in regulation 7(3) and why?
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NFCC is not best placed to answer this question. Those with more experience and knowledge in this area will be able to provide more comprehensive details.

Laminated glass

		Yes	No	Unsure
Q13	Do you agree that laminated glass in balcony construction should continue to have to achieve A2-s1, d0 classification or A1? Please provide evidence to support your answer where possible and discuss specific materials or products.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<p>Glass within a door or window frame (which includes laminated glass) is already outside the scope of the ban on combustible materials and therefore, as a material, it will still be used in the construction of many external walls regardless of its use on balconies.</p> <p>While we have recommended that other parts of the built environment meet classification A2-s1, d0, we have no information to suggest that laminated glass as part of a balcony is the cause of significant risk, and it is understood that there are ongoing research and testing projects to better understand the risks of laminated glass in relation to external fire spread. The findings of this should be used to help inform decisions regarding whether laminated glass is included within the list of exemptions in Regulation 7(3).</p>				

Roof Components

		Yes	No	Unsure
Q14	Do you agree that additional clarification in regulations or Approved Document B, that roofing membranes are not required to achieve A2-s1, d0 classification or higher when used as part of a roof connecting to an external wall is required? If no, please provide an explanation with evidence to support your answer where possible and discuss specific materials or products.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<p>NFCC is not aware of the extent to which this inconsistency regarding roofing membranes in the Building Regulations/ADB affects the construction industry. Those with more experience in this particular matter will be able to provide more details. As a general observation, where clarification is to be provided on the performance requirements of any component, it would be much clearer if the guidance presented a minimum performance standard that should be achieved, rather than referencing a performance standard that it does not need to achieve.</p>				

If the performance classification of a wall is deemed not to be required at this junction, there should be a limit as to how far those materials extend into the wall (i.e. no further than xx mm).

Materials below ground level

		Yes	No	Unsure
Q15	Do you agree with the proposal of expanding the exemption of the use of water proofing and insulation material from below ground level to up to 300mm above ground level? If yes, what other conditions should be imposed on their use if any?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

NFCC is not best placed to answer this question. Those with more experience and knowledge in this area will be able to provide more comprehensive details.

We note that there is scope for confusion in fully understanding this exemption in buildings on sloping sites where “300mm above ground level” in one part of the wall could equate to a significantly greater height elsewhere.

Floor Testing

		Yes	No	Unsure
Q16	Do you agree with the proposed expansion of classifications required for materials used horizontally to include Class A2fl-s1 and Class A1fl? If no, please explain why and provide evidence where possible.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

While we agree with the proposal to incorporate the horizontal classifications, we note that the current tests can account for smoke production but not for flaming droplets. Whilst this is understandable given the intended use as flooring, in the context of their use on balcony floors it gives rise to the possibility of vertical fire spread down a building if the surface on which the flooring materials sit has gaps – e.g. slat-like flooring – allowing flaming droplets to fall below.

The imperforate balcony also adds to the risk of a vertical spire spreading up the building, potentially exposing any items on the balcony to direct flame impingement from a fire below. It is noted that guidance on balconies within ADB is currently very limited and should be expanded upon to address these concerns.

Part 2

Evacuation alert systems

		Yes	No	Unsure
Q17	Do you agree with the proposal to require the provision of evacuation alert systems in new blocks of flats 18m or more above ground level?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

NFCC agrees that evacuation alert systems (EAS) should be required in new blocks of flats over 18m.

A requirement for EAS would partially satisfy the recommendation in the Grenfell Tower Inquiry Phase One Report that all high-rise residential buildings (both those already in existence and those built in the future) be equipped with facilities for use by the fire and rescue services, enabling them to send an evacuation signal to the whole of (or a selected part of) the building.

Buildings should never require the use of such a system if designed, built, managed, and maintained appropriately. However, in the event that an FRS decides that a building must be evacuated in part or in full, EAS provides them with another tool that can be used alongside traditional methods of alerting residents including door knocking and instruction from control staff. Compared to those traditional methods, an EAS gives FRSs a way of instantly directing (after an assessment by operational crews) residents to evacuate rather than staying in their individual flats.

EAS have been available for a couple of years and have been a requirement in new blocks of flats over 18m in England since last year. In that time, FRSs have developed procedures to support their effective use. Where EAS are proposed, FRSs should be consulted to ensure the system is fit for purpose. While this requirement is included within BS8629, we would like to see this highlighted within the guidance in ADB directly.

Q18	Do you agree with the height threshold of 18m or more above ground level? If no, please provide alternative height threshold and any evidence.	Yes	No	Unsure
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Agree, subject to being kept under review as further learning emerges.

NFCC acknowledges that following the initial development of BS8629, we called for EAS to be provided in blocks of flats over 11m as part of a package of measures. This viewpoint pre-dated the installation of any EAS and our understanding of these systems, and the operational procedures fire services have developed to support their use has increased significantly since this time.

In the event of a fire, the decision by the FRS to use the EAS needs to be carefully considered to ensure that building occupants are not exposed to unnecessary risk, and FRSs have developed operational procedures to support their safe and effective use.

Allowing FRSs to initiate a signal to evacuate a floor at a time, the benefits of an EAS in a block of flats will increase as the height of the building also increases. Whilst there will be buildings under 18m where an EAS would represent a provision that offers practical benefits to responding firefighters, this would likely be due to factors relating to the overall size or layout of the building as much as the height. The decision of whether to install an EAS should always be made based on an appropriate risk assessment of the building in question, regardless of height, and this should be underscored by guidance.

Q19	Are there any other types of buildings which should be included? Please provide any evidence.	Yes	No	Unsure
		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

EAS are intended for use by FRSs to inform building occupants that they should evacuate.

In buildings other than blocks of flats with a stay-put policy, arrangements should already be in place to facilitate evacuation, whether that be full simultaneous, or some form of phased or partial evacuation. This will necessitate a fire alarm system, supported by management procedures to ensure everybody gets out safely.

In the event of a fire in these buildings, evacuation should already be underway, possibly even complete, by the time the FRS arrives on site. Accordingly, the provision

of an EAS may not offer any significant additional benefit; the decision of whether to install an EAS should always be made based on an appropriate risk assessment of the building in question, regardless of height, and this should be underscored by guidance.

Secure information boxes

		Yes	No	Unsure
Q20	Do you agree with the proposal to introduce a requirement for Secure Information Boxes in all new blocks of flats with a storey 11m or more above ground level?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Agree.

The provision of Secure Information Boxes (SIBs) can greatly assist firefighters in responding to incidents and NFCC supports the proposals for them to be provided in blocks of flats with a storey 11m or more above ground level.

Whilst this will introduce a requirement to provide SIBs on new buildings, there is no separate regulatory requirement to ensure these boxes contain information relevant to responding firefighters. Whilst it is acknowledged that SIBs are not a new concept, and some building and business owners already use them to provide information to FRSs, there may be a need to introduce additional legislative requirements to do so.

A similar requirement to provide SIBs for new blocks of flats exists in England, however, this is supported by Fire Safety (England) Regulations 2022 which apply from occupation onward. This legislation sets out the information the Responsible Person must provide within the SIB, including floor and building plans and information on the external walls. NFCC would like to see similar legislation introduced in Wales.

NFCC welcomes the proposed reference to the use of the best practice guidance on SIBs published by the Fire Industry Association, however, note that it only refers to sections 2 to 4. In the absence of any alternative guidance on the information that should be provided, ADB should advise that the guidance also sets out the information the FRS would expect to see stored within the SIB.

		Yes	No	Unsure
Q21	Do you agree with the height threshold of 11m? If no, please provide alternative height threshold and any evidence.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

The provision of SIBs containing relevant information can assist firefighters in responding to incidents in all buildings irrespective of height or use.

There will be residential buildings under 11m in height where NFCC would fully support requirements for a SIB, however, this would not be based on the height threshold alone and would consider other factors related to the design, use, and occupation of the building.

Equally, there will be smaller blocks of flats (for example, small single-stair buildings with flats opening directly off the stairs) where the provision of a SIB would not offer significant benefit to an FRS due to the very limited information it could contain.

For new developments containing multiple buildings of this nature, this would necessitate many SIBs likely containing very similar, but limited information. In such instances, where the individual buildings themselves are considered small and low risk, the requirement for a “site SIB” might be a more proportionate solution that better addresses the challenges FRSs are likely to encounter – for example, information to help identify the different blocks of flats, such as a site plan, may be more useful than floorplans of the individual buildings themselves.

Wherever SIBs are provided, upon occupation there needs to be a liaison between the Responsible Person and the FRS to ensure they will have access to the SIB (e.g. a key). These arrangements between the RP and the FRS will then need to be managed for the life of the building. Accordingly, requirements for SIBs should only be introduced where they will be able to contain information that would be of practical assistance to an FRS.

Any requirements to provide SIBs on new buildings would be undermined if there is no separate regulatory requirement to ensure these boxes contain information relevant to responding firefighters. Whilst it is acknowledged that SIBs are not a new concept, and they are already used by some building and business owners to provide information to FRSs, there may be a need to introduce additional legislative requirements to do so.

Q22	Are there any other types of buildings which should be included? Please provide any evidence.
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The provision of SIBs containing relevant information can assist firefighters in responding to incidents in all buildings irrespective of height or use.

Wherever SIBs are provided, upon occupation there needs to be a liaison between the Responsible Person and the FRS to ensure they will have access to the SIB (e.g. a key). These arrangements between the RP and the FRS will then need to be managed for the life of the building. Accordingly, requirements for SIBs should only be introduced where they will be able to contain information that would be of practical assistance to the FRS.

Premises where an FRS would benefit from the provision of a SIB include:

- Large or tall premises.
- Complex premises or those incorporating fire engineering.
- Premises with an occupancy that is considered large or vulnerable.
- Unmanned buildings where there would be nobody to meet an attending FRS.
- Premises containing direct risks to firefighters (e.g. hazardous storage or processes).

Any requirements to provide SIBs on new buildings would be undermined if there is no separate regulatory requirement to ensure these boxes contain information relevant to responding firefighters. Whilst it is acknowledged that SIBs are not a new concept, and they are already used by some building and business owners to provide information to FRSs, there may be a need to introduce additional legislative requirements to do so.

Wayfinding signage

		Yes	No	Unsure
Q23	Do you agree with the proposal to introduce wayfinding signage for the fire service in all new blocks of flats (Purpose Group 1(a)) with a storey 11m or more above ground level?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Agree. The provision of adequate signage at a low level has been identified as an advantage in the recommendations of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry Phase One Report, as well as two Coroner's Rule 43 letters: these were issued by K St J Wiseman (Shirley Towers) and Francis Kirkham CBE (Lakanal House). These reports both recommended additional signage to aid firefighters in identifying areas of the building.

The current version of Welsh ADB does not refer to the provision of wayfinding signage for FRSs, whereas the English version does. The inclusion of guidance for this area, including recommendations for the type of purpose groups/occupancies where wayfinding systems should be installed, would help to give a consistent approach.

Whilst NFCC welcomes the proposal for wayfinding signage in all blocks of flats over 11m, we believe the scope for this requirement should be expanded upon. See our responses to Q24 and Q25.

Q24	Do you agree with the height threshold of 11m? If no, please provide alternative height threshold and any evidence.	Yes	No	Unsure
		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

The situations where wayfinding signage would be of benefit are not limited to buildings above 11m. In any premises exceeding a single storey, there is an opportunity to become disorientated. Similarly, in any premises exceeding a single storey, firefighters may need to identify specific floors. This is especially the case where there are multiple exits on different floors (buildings on sloping sites), the use of different exits on different floors of flats (maisonettes for example), or where access from stairs does not cover every floor. Given that the cost per building of implementing this measure is likely to be low, it is our position to support the provision of wayfinding signage in all multi-occupied residential buildings.

NFCC notes that the requirement for wayfinding signage is limited to buildings over 11m in England, with the same threshold also proposed for Northern Ireland, and in both we have called for similar changes.

Q25	Are there any other types of buildings which should be included? Please provide any evidence.
	<p>The situations where wayfinding signage would be of benefit are not solely limited to blocks of flats. In any premises exceeding a single storey, there is an opportunity to become disorientated and firefighters may need to identify specific floors. This is equally an issue for storeys below ground (i.e. basements) as it is for storeys above ground.</p> <p>The considerations of guidance for this area should extend further, into other occupancies, such as sleeping accommodation including hotels and areas (such as basements and basement car parks) where wayfinding can be challenging.</p> <p>There are too many design permutations to fully capture scenarios where we believe wayfinding signage should be provided. Recognising the intent of wayfinding signage is to assist firefighters, in buildings other than blocks of flats an appropriate starting</p>

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point for expanding the scope of the requirement might be to align with the requirement for a firefighting shaft.

Where wayfinding signage is to be installed on-premises, guidance should include a standardised format for the numbering of flats e.g. the first number will always denote the floor number (101,102, etc.) and if the ground, basements, or lower ground levels are used these should be denoted with appropriate letters (G, B, LG, etc).

Whilst the focus of this consultation is on new buildings, NFCC would like to see the requirement for wayfinding signage in blocks of flats extended to cover existing buildings. Within England, the Fire Safety (England) Regulations 2022 introduced a requirement for existing blocks of flats above 18m to be provided with wayfinding signage. Given the relative ease with which wayfinding signage can be provided, we would also like to see this requirement mirrored in Wales.

European fire classifications

		Yes	No	Unsure
Q26	Do you agree that the national classifications for reaction to fire and fire resistance should be removed from the main body Approved Document B? If you disagree, what evidence can you provide which outlines why.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

It appears reasonable to remove the ambiguity that currently exists in having two separate testing routes within ADB. We also note the removal of the national classes has been planned for some time.

We do acknowledge this may have an impact in the shorter term of appropriate products being available as the sector transitions to the European standards, although the proposal is not a 'new' testing regime as these European standards have been available for some time. There will however be a need to engage with the sector which will be better placed to discuss these impacts to ensure there is an appropriate supply of products to market.

Call for evidence

European fire classifications

Q27	Please outline any concerns (as suggested in paragraph 65) you have about the withdrawal of all the references to the BS 476 series of national classifications within Approved Document B (including appendices).
<p>As stated in our answer to Q26, the risk of removing reference to a particular standard would be that there would be no (or limited) availability of certain products until such a time that manufacturers have tested their products in accordance with European Standards.</p> <p>NFCC are not best placed to advise on the specific product areas most likely to be affected by this change.</p>	

Second staircases

		Yes	No	Unsure
Q28	Do you consider that Approved Document B should include a maximum threshold for the provision of a single staircase in residential buildings?			
	Please consider when providing your answer: (a) what height do you think the threshold should be set? (b) What design considerations should be considered in requiring a second staircase? (e.g. appropriate separation between staircases).	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>NFCC agrees that ADB should include a maximum threshold for the provision of a single staircase in residential buildings. Wales is one of the few countries in Europe, Australasia, or North America without a height limit on single staircase residential buildings. Single staircase residential buildings require additional justification and fire safety provisions beyond the requirements of existing guidance to account for the changing behaviour of occupants and modern use of buildings. However, even with</p>				

additional fire safety provisions, there is a limit to where single staircases should be relied on.

Multiple protected staircases create more resilience to support evacuation and firefighting operations. The need for unambiguous guidance is particularly important given the clear problem with culture and competency identified across the design and construction industry since the Grenfell Tower fire tragedy. We would also recommend that the introduction of a single staircase height threshold must also be complemented by reviewing the rules applying to evacuation lifts.

Buildings that are built, maintained, used, and managed as intended should enable residents to evacuate safely in the event of a fire, and multiple protected staircases make tall buildings safer by design.

The current system allows for many designs to rely too heavily on management practices to ensure that they work effectively in occupation. It is a dangerous omission within ADB and other building regulations that they do not account for how the building will be used in occupation including their management. This means that many buildings are only as safe as their management while, at the same time the speed of change with the way we use buildings, construction methods, and the fire loading within modern homes has outpaced design guidance.

(a) what height do you think the threshold should be set?

NFCC believes that the height limit should be set at 18m or at least 7 storeys. An 18m or at least 7 storeys threshold would provide continuity of message and clarity across government, aligning with definitions in the Building Safety Act and the Government's ban on the use of combustible materials.

This would also help to synchronise standards across the United Kingdom by aligning to rules in Scotland and the recent government commitment in England. While arguments exist for a range of thresholds, both higher and lower, 18m or at least 7 storeys would bring the greatest harmonisation with the wider regulatory environment in the United Kingdom, and the greatest simplicity and certainty for the industry at this time.

We would support the acceptable height threshold being lower in some cases dependent on factors such as the number of flats per floor and the travel distances to staircases. Whether or not multiple protected staircases should be required below 18m should be assessed on a case-by-case basis, with consideration of what additional measures have been proposed by the design team.

NFCC is also aware that there has been some research that has shown that natural ventilation and some configurations of Mechanical Smoke Ventilation Systems (known as 'MSVS') do not work within high-rise buildings above a certain height owing to the

effects of wind. It is industry-accepted that this height limit is 23m. These smoke control systems are primarily intended to prevent smoke from spreading into the staircases, so the provision of a second staircase would help address concerns that they may not always perform as expected.

(b) What design considerations should be considered in requiring a second staircase? (e.g. appropriate separation between staircases).

The fundamental consideration should be that a fire should not impact both stairs and this should consider not only the physical separation between them but also how the smoke control system will be designed which should be to minimise the impact between the spaces.

While separation in terms of distance between staircases may be important, other aspects will be equally, if not more, important. Two poorly designed, or poorly protected staircases will not provide sufficient alternatives for escape and firefighting and are therefore not appropriate.

The ADB solutions proposed should reflect the need for each of the stairs to be capable of being used as true independent alternatives; for both firefighting and escape from anywhere in the building. To enable this all staircases should:

- Have direct access (e.g. via a dedicated protected lobby) to sufficient numbers of firefighting and evacuation lifts such that the required escape capacity is achieved, equity of escape is provided for all building users, and sufficient resilience is in place should a lift not be available (for example through repair or maintenance).
- Be protected by a dedicated lobby which should always prevent the ingress of smoke (i.e. in both escape and firefighting) to enable occupants to safely await the arrival of an evacuation lift. The lobby should also provide sufficient passive fire protection and firefighting facilities to allow fire crews to instigate firefighting from either the stairs or directly from the lobby itself.
- Be protected by smoke control to prevent the ingress of smoke into the lobby and stairs (as above). The independent smoke control assigned to each stair/lobby/corridor combination will likely need to operate concurrently with a smoke control system protecting an adjacent stair/lobby/corridor combination to ensure that dominant air paths are not detrimental.
- Be protected by a smoke control system that allows firefighters to move from upstream of the air paths to approach the potential fire flat in the same direction as the airflow instigated by the smoke control system.
- Provide the staircase, lobby, and corridor combination for each stair such that occupants do not need to move through a lobby associated with one staircase to access the other staircase.

Alongside this, ADB should have a clear scope and a clear definition of where it can (and more importantly cannot) be used.

If the principles above are fulfilled, staircases in close proximity may in fact be considered true alternatives and therefore may be appropriate.

Q29

We have asked a number of specific questions throughout this paper, if you have any further comments to make regarding any of the proposals, please set them out here.

NFCC has nothing to add here.

Impact Assessments

		Yes	No	Unsure
Q30	Do you agree with the cost estimates and the overall Impact Assessment? If no, please explain what you consider appropriate and provide evidence to show why.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

The impact assessment does not seem to address why the consultation proposals have not gone further; many types of buildings are not included in the cost analysis. This seems like a missed opportunity to quantify the economic impact of increasing the scope of the proposed regulations and justify the limits to the proposed change. Since there is only one counterfactual and there appears to be no economic justification for the limits on scope, NFCC sees no reason why the scope should not be reviewed.

Also, the extension of the combustible cladding ban as NFCC has suggested would have additional future benefits in that there would hopefully be less need for public sector resources to be involved in extensive remediation programmes. The present culture has meant that significant additional public resources (from FRSs and others) have been consumed in response to inappropriate materials being used in and on buildings, including [more than £5 billion of government funding already allocated](#) for remediation in England. Additionally, the median monthly Waking Watch cost per building ([as published by DLUHC](#)) is £11,361, or £137 per dwelling; these are expenses incurred by the inappropriate use of combustible materials in our built environment. The cost of the proposals is a capital cost burden mainly to industry, who are working with extremely large profit margins, rather than the public. We note that net present value means that any money saved now will be worth far more in the public purse in the future.

Q31	<p>We would like to know your views on the effects that the proposed amendments would have on the Welsh language, specifically on opportunities for people to use Welsh and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than English.</p> <p>What effects do you think there would be? How could positive effects be increased, or negative effects be mitigated?</p>
<p>NFCC is not aware of any specific impacts these proposals would have on the Welsh language.</p>	

Q32	Please also explain how you believe the proposed actions could be formulated or changed so as to have positive effects, or increased positive effects, on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language, and no adverse effects on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language.
NFCC is not aware of any specific impacts these proposals would have on the Welsh language.	

1. This consultation will close on 09 January 2024. Responses to this consultation will be analysed and a Welsh Government Response will follow.
2. Responses to consultations are likely to be made public, on the internet or in a report. If you would prefer your response to remain anonymous, please tick here.