

To whom it may concern:

## **Re: Fire Safety in London's Shopping Centres**

London Fire Brigade (LFB) is concerned by a number of fires that have taken place in shopping centres in London. The global pandemic of Covid-19 and the subsequent economic downturn pressures are impacting many sectors including retail. Some of these pressures historically affect the fire safety of buildings including maintenance of fire safety systems, appliance maintenance, fire safety management and of course the risk of arson remains.

LFB would therefore like to highlight the importance of fire safety management in such premises and measures you should take to ensure the safety of members of the public and staff, as well as our firefighters who may need to attend should a fire break out. Shopping centres are generally the most complicated of retail structures, requiring a fire alarm system sufficiently intricate to provide communication between active systems such as Automatic Fire Suppression Systems (AFSS) such as sprinklers, smoke control provision, emergency lighting and staffed control centres.

LFB believes that AFSS play a significant role, as part of an appropriate package of fire safety measures, in reducing the impact of fire on people, property and the environment. They also assist firefighters in carrying out search and rescue operations by limiting fire development, which significantly reduces the risks to firefighters.

Fires have a significant impact on business continuity which can lead to business closures, environmental impacts and have a large drain on fire and rescue services. For example, a fire that occurred on 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2019 at a London shopping centre resulted in the attendance of 20 fire appliances and in excess of 100 firefighters. The shopping centre remained closed for several hours due to the scale of the incident and this affected many companies through business interruption costs and losses.

The cost of fire related insurance claims in the UK is significant. In 2016 insurers paid out £885 million from commercial and industrial claims. Fires have considerable economic, social and environmental costs and so it is important that businesses understand the benefits of resilience and mitigating the risk of fire related damage, with AFSS being one of the most effective fire protection measures for commercial premises.

**The following advice is intended for designated fire safety managers who have responsibility for fire safety within a building and I would request that you share this information with appropriate individuals in your shopping centre complex.**

### **Fire Protection Measures**

It is essential that the fire protection measures in a building can function effectively in the event of a fire. To achieve this, they should be maintained periodically in accordance with the relevant standards/codes, to ensure they are operational and available at all times. This should include regular inspections of all AFSS, e.g. isolation valves (where installed) are secured in the open position.

## Help Us Help You

During an incident, our firefighters are likely to interact with the AFSS systems within the building. It is best practice that the relevant information is readily available on site for the crews, ideally in a Premises Information Box, and that it is concise and accurate. Some of the information that should be made available includes but is not limited to:

- General overview of the AFSS system
- Zone and coverage of the AFSS
- Type of water supply/duration
- Laminated copies, zoned map that is easy to read and includes the location of the isolation valve sets and pump room
- 24 hour contact numbers for relevant contractors.

## Leased Units

Where a building is occupied or partially occupied by tenants, due to the terms of the leases, the responsibility for fire safety arrangements for the individual unit normally rests with the shop owner/occupier. This individual is responsible for ensuring their unit complies with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (the Fire Safety Order). They should therefore be aware of all their statutory fire safety responsibilities for their particular part of the building, whilst considering the impact that a fire can have on others.

It is important that arrangements are in place to ensure the Responsible Person (RP) for each individual unit is aware of the necessary fire safety arrangements within the building. This information should be shared with tenants as well as ensuring their lease agreements are fully understood with regards to the fire protection measures and maintenance of the fire safety systems, e.g. fire alarms, emergency escape lighting, AFSS and fire extinguishers.

## Role of Responsible Persons

It is a requirement of the Fire Safety Order for the RP to implement the appropriate arrangements for the effective planning, organisation, control, monitoring and review of preventive and protective measures.

The Fire Safety Order also requires that where two or more responsible persons share, or have duties in respect of a premises, they must co-operate and take reasonable steps to co-ordinate necessary measures and provide information to appropriate persons. This means that unit occupiers and the managers of the shopping centre/mall have a duty to co-operate to ensure the whole premises are safe.

We ask that you consider the contents of this letter carefully and whether you need to do more to ensure all occupiers understand their fire safety responsibilities. In particular, you should consider whether your premises fire risk assessment needs to be reviewed in the light of the issues raised in this letter.

For further information on AFSS, please visit the London Fire Brigade website <https://www.london-fire.gov.uk/safety/property-management/sprinklers/>.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'N. King', written in a cursive style.

**Paul Jennings**  
**Assistant Commissioner**  
**Fire Safety**

**Reply to** LFB AFSS Coordinator  
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