



Purpose

Briefing note on the new 2019 Approved Documents B1 Fire Safety in Dwellings and B2 Fire safety in Buildings other than Dwellings with further comments on balconies and external fire spread.

New: Approved Documents B1 & B2 2019

On July 5th 2019 DCLG released the latest updates to Approved Documents B1 Fire Safety in Dwellings and B2 Fire safety in Buildings other than Dwellings. These new documents only come into force in England and are subject to the following transitional arrangements. The new clarified approved documents do not apply in any case where a building notice or an initial has been given to, or full plans deposited with, a local authority and either the building work to which it relates –

- (a) Has started before the date that a building notice, initial notice or full plans have been deposited or
- (b) Is started within the period of two months beginning on that date the building notice, initial notice or full plans have been deposited.

The new approved documents will come into force on 30 August 2019. Copies are available from the link: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fire-safety-approved-document-b>

Approved Document B1 has been re-written to make guidance clearer and easier to follow and now includes flats (including student accommodation designed as flats) . Highlighted additions include the following:

- New guidance on the use of air circulation systems in dwellings such as MVHR in section 2.8-2.9 to include shut down requirements and the thermostat location and flats in section 3.23.
- Section B3 includes compartmentation, cavity barrier and sprinkler provision details similar to amendments in Approved Document B2.
- Requirement B4 for External Fire Spread includes Regulations 7 for Materials & Workmanship to include the requirement for A1 or A2-s1, dO rated products (with a list of exceptions) in building over 18m.
- Further clarification is provided on products used on external walls and this now also covers buildings going through a material change of use.
- The document has been updated to include further guidance on riser mains, hydrants, fire-fighting shafts and basement venting.
- There is a new Section 19 for Regulation 38 and requirements for fire safety information under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order.
- Sprinklers have been included with information provided in Appendix E.

Approved Document B2 has been re-written to make the guidance clearer and easier to follow and has had the section on flats removed. Highlighted additions include the following:

- New guidance on the requirements for sub-division of corridors to include a diagram showing suitable methods for cavity closing to internal walls in Section 2.26-2.27 and diagram 2.9.
- Construction of stairs/escape stairs is covered under Section 3 for vertical escape rather than section 5 for General Provisions.
- Small premises now have their own area – Section 4.
- Section 6: Wall and Ceiling linings now also covers the use of insulated core panels used internally (such as ACM).
- Diagram 9.1 showing cavities and cavity barrier/fire-stopping requirements has been re-drawn to make the location requirements clearer.
- Further clarity is provided through text and diagrams concerning the protection of ductwork to escape routes with fire or fire and smoke dampers in Section 10.
- Requirement B4 for External Fire Spread includes Regulations 7 for Materials & Workmanship to include the requirement for A1 or A2-s1, d0 rated products (with a list of exceptions) in building over 18m.
- Further clarification is provided on products used on external walls and this now also covers buildings going through a material change of use.
- There is a greater level of guidance including diagrams for the construction of fire-fighting shafts in Section 17.
- There is a new Section 19 for Regulation 38 and requirements for fire safety information under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order.
Sprinklers have been included with information provided in Appendix E.

Summary

Overall there has been an emphasis on making the documents easier to read in plain English and understand with better clarity including the requirements for buildings over 18m. This should hopefully provide comfort for fears our clients may have towards fire related issues on future projects.

Balconies and external fire spread

Following a fire at a block of flats in Barking on 9th June 2019 the government issued an advice note on the construction of balconies to all buildings whether over 18m or not.

Balconies made from combustible materials such as wood can provide a potential source of rapid fire spread and that developers should have made sure balconies didn't compromise resident safety before the ban on combustible materials was announced in December 2018.

Building owners are advised to check the products used on balconies and must make sure they are included as part of any fire risk assessment. Where there is doubt expressed over materials used building owners should seek the advice from an appropriately qualified and competent professional to advise them on actions that can and should be taken. Ideally as a recommendation any products found to be combustible should be replaced with products that are non-combustible Class A1 or of limited combustibility Class A2-s1, d0.

Products that do not meet the requirement for being non-combustible can include; but is not limited to the following. (Please note there can be exceptions if approved test data is available)

- Wood including cross laminated timber. Often used in cladding and for balconies.
- ACM cladding such as that used on Grenfell.
- High pressure laminate cladding – currently undergoing government tests.
- PIR insulation products.

(Please note whilst government advice is that non-combustible material must be used it does allow products of limited combustibility – in the governments eyes they still both count as not being combustible.)

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