

10 Lessons from Grenfell

Lessons from the Grenfell Fire Disaster, based on feedback from a wide range of organisations and residents across the country living in and managing multi-storey housing.

The following are key lessons for the future:

1. It is **crucial to listen to tenants**, not just because they are entitled to have a voice in what happens in and around their homes, but also because they often know more than staff do about what happens in the blocks where they live, which are usually 40-50 years old or more.
 - Landlords benefit greatly from liaising with tenants, as many tenants have been around for longer than housing staff; they often know more about who lives in their block and what changes have been made.
 - Tenants are also valuable conduits for information to other tenants and can pass on advice, instructions and gather useful information that helps landlords.
2. There should be a **single point of control for any multi-storey block** so that everyone knows, whether it is staff, residents, or emergency services, where to go and who is responsible whenever an emergency arises. There should be clear information and instructions for all tenants about what to do in the case of emergency and what precautions to take to keep the building and homes safe.
3. There needs to be a **continuous sequence of recorded information**, from the start of any works on multi-storey blocks to the finish, handed over on completion to the responsible owner/manager. A full record of what has been done, how much it cost, the rationale, the specifications and implementation allows any follow-up decisions to use those records to check what is proposed and make sure that building elements are maintained as they should be for fire and other safety reasons.
4. There should be an equivalent of **an MOT for all tower blocks, multi-storey, and high rise blocks** as they are complex systems, involving the interaction of many different technical features such as plumbing, electrical wiring, heating, lift maintenance, roof and windows. Importantly, the 'multi-storey MOT' would cover fire doors, fire precautions and means of escape.

5. The **containment of fire within each individual flat** is absolutely crucial (commonly known as compartmentation). A breach in the party or external walls of flats, often caused by installing television wiring, gas piping, or electric wiring or other works. This can create a conduit for fire, as has happened in several tragic cases. Containment must be regularly inspected, at least once a year to ensure it is intact.
6. **In-depth fire inspections** should happen every year. In-depth means that an inspection should be carried out by qualified inspectors and is not just a superficial check on conditions, but also checking walls, equipment, cupboards, etc. to ensure there are no breaches of fire safety or containment.
7. The landlord needs **clear knowledge of, and control over conditions affecting multi-storey blocks, including leasehold properties, private lettings and subletting**. It is essential to know who lives in all the flats and for the landlord to have the right to enter and inspect any flat where there is a potential hazard. There should also be a clear leasehold agreement so that leaseholders are obliged to provide access keys in case of leaks or any other breaches of containment.
8. The landlord should have **the ability to ensure basic conditions are maintained for all residents through on-site management and supervision**. In the case of tower blocks, a concierge at the base of the block is an ideal solution. It is crucial that a landlord is able to enforce on all residents a basic standard, both in the stairwells and within units. This requires on-site management and supervision. There should also be the ability to enforce on social conditions, which is very important in multi-storey blocks when neighbours must accept other people's right to a peaceful home.
9. It is important to consider the maintenance of multi-storey blocks as an engineering challenge where **precision and quality control are essential**. This lesson is based on Judith Hackitt's Interim Recommendations in her Review of Building Regulations.
10. There should be **no shortcutting on cost and quality**. Short term savings can lead to huge long-term costs, as happened in the case of Grenfell Tower but also in Lakanal House and other examples of failure.