



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

PUBLIC PETITION NO.

PE01719

Name of petitioner

Rachel Gibson on behalf of tenants Cartcraigs Road, G431AA

Petition title

Review of fire safety stay-put policy

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to review the current 'stay-put' policy as it applies to the fire strategy for existing multi-storey residential buildings

Action taken to resolve issues of concern before submitting the petition

Contacted James Dornan, MSP.

Petition background information

The advice to tenants in high-rise flats is contained in a leaflet that says in the event of fire in their own flat the household should leave and call the fire services. However, if the fire is in another flat the advice given is:

- Stay in your flat and keep the front door closed,
- Pack a towel or sheets around the bottom of the front door to stop smoke getting in,
- Go to an open window and wait for the arrival of the Fire and Rescue Service; and,

ONLY LEAVE THE SAFETY OF YOUR FLAT IF YOU'RE AFFECTED BY HEAT OR SMOKE, OR IF YOU'RE TOLD TO LEAVE BY FIREFIGHTERS OR THE POLICE.

This advice comes from the 'stay-put' policy and the last sentence sums up the crux of the problem. Tenants in high-rise buildings are not notified as a matter of course if a fire is spreading somewhere in the building. Therefore, when tenants do 'stay-put' it is more likely because they are unaware that there is a fire than it is because they are choosing not to leave. This gives the lie to the claim that the stay-put policy is advice only and that tenants may choose to leave if they wish; obviously for them to make this choice they would need to know in the first place that there was a fire.

The stay-put policy is based on the fact that multi-storey buildings are 'compartmentalised'; that is, they are constructed in such a way that flats are separated from each other by fire-resistant doors and walls. The theory is that this compartmentation will prevent a fire in one flat from spreading to a neighbouring flat, at least for long enough to allow fire services time to arrive and put it out.

However, although the doors and walls are said to be able to resist fire for one hour, this time is calculated from on tests where the temperature is raised bit by bit, (as might be expected in the case of a normal domestic fire), to the point where ignition occurs. In fact, some materials when ignited reach the threshold much faster, resulting in the compartmentation being breached much faster. Furthermore, since the time of their construction, many high-rise buildings have undergone extensive refurbishment including cladding added to the outside and rewiring drilled through the inside all of which has potentially compromised the robustness of the original compartmentation.

Scottish Fire and Rescue Services (SFRS) advise that there have been no deaths from fire in multi-storey flats since 2009 implying that current measures work. However, lessons learned from the Grenfell fire led to various improvements being made to these buildings only last year; these include new dry risers and bin chute seal hoppers being fitted as well as sprinklers being installed in the bin store on the ground floor. It is doubtless that these improvements add to fire prevention precautions. However, their absence suggests that risks existed before which also brings into question the reliability of the quarterly block inspections by SFRS who missed these areas of potential risk and, even if unwittingly, may be missing others yet to be identified.

The risk of fire spreading from the flat of origin is thought to be low: however in the event that such a thing did happen, we would argue that the risk to tenants is high. This is because any fire that can breach compartmentation would have to be exceptional and, therefore, extremely unpredictable. We would argue that all tenants should be notified immediately, and as a matter of policy, when it is known that fire has breached compartmentation and we believe in these circumstances that most people would choose to leave the building. The Police could be deployed for this task and thus avoid any disruption to the efforts of fire personnel in fighting the fire

The stay-put policy is not applied UK wide, for instance, Greater Manchester Fire Rescue Service advises tenants in high-rise buildings that if there is a fire in any flat they should 'get out and stay out'. Furthermore, new Scottish legislation is due this year which says that new high-rise buildings will include, 'improved evacuation measures including sound alerts and escape stairs'; a clear admission surely that measures for existing high-rise buildings are insufficient.

Unique web address

<https://www.parliament.scot/GettingInvolved/Petitions/stayputpolicy>

Related information for petition

Do you wish your petition to be hosted on the Parliament's website to collect signatures online?

YES

How many signatures have you collected so far?

0

Closing date for collecting signatures online

08 / 05 / 2019

Comments to stimulate online discussion

1. Do you agree that it should it be a policy rule that tenants in high-rise flats are told immediately when a fire is spreading in their building so that they do not 'stay put' in ignorance?
2. Would you stay in your flat in a high-rise building if you knew that fire was spreading from one of the other flats, even if this was several floors away from your flat?