

Building Safety Update: Fire Safety in the External Walls at N26

As you will know, recent inspections have identified some issues which may impact on the Fire Strategy for Plot N26. Inspections took place at Kaleidoscope House and Chroma House, however, we have been advised by the fire engineers to assume the problems identified are present throughout all tall blocks in N26 (this includes Meller House, Seasons House and Patina Mansions).

What does this mean?

A recent inspection of the building's external wall system has confirmed that the materials on the exterior are fire resistant.

While it can be confirmed that this is not the type of cladding involved in some recent high-profile fires, it has been found that some of the insulation is combustible. This can be okay if it is completely covered and there are fire stopping materials to prevent fire spreading. The engineers have found some gaps in the fire stopping that need fixing. The engineers also need to check whether some of the fire stopping materials meet the required standards.

EVML have introduced additional safety patrols as a precautionary measure and we support this action.

Am I in danger?

We would like to assure you that your building is structurally sound, and all our life safe systems for the building have been serviced and are working well.

We would like you to know that there is no immediate danger; and the fire safety procedures and other measures we have in place mean that there is no cause for alarm. EVML have taken these measures as a precaution – to keep you safe in the unlikely event of a fire.

So what has changed?

Until now, if a fire was to occur, the London Fire Brigade recommended what is known as a “stay put” strategy, whereby residents would remain in their homes until fire officers indicated that they should leave. However, this has been upgraded to a “simultaneous evacuation”

strategy, where residents should leave the building via the process indicated on the building's safety notice.

How was this decision made?

The fire engineers report highlighted the problems with the buildings and recommended a fire risk assessment be carried out and a review of the fire strategy. EVML approached their fire risk assessors who reviewed the engineers report. They worked with EVML to produce a new fire strategy for the blocks after evaluating the fire engineers report. EVML have also been discussing the issue with the Fire Brigade.

At the moment, EVML believe it is likely that the problems are present throughout the tall blocks in N26. The new fire strategy has therefore been implemented across each block in the plot.

EVML, the fire engineers and the fire risk assessors followed the advice set out by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and the National Fire Chiefs' Council.

What will the safety patrols do?

In the interim and as a precaution we have implemented the simultaneous evacuation strategy in the event of a fire alert. We are supporting this by undertaking a 24-hour patrol of the walls of the buildings. These patrol officers will be clearly identified with hi-vis wear, will be CRB-checked, and will carry EVML-issued identification.

There will be one operative assigned per building (one operative in each of the five buildings), with an additional back up of three operatives to patrol the exterior and car park areas and to provide back-up and break relief for the building operatives. There are eight in total. This is the recommended amount provided to EVML by their fire risk assessor.

They will be patrolling each floor, communal areas, and stairwells, to ensure there are no signs of fire, combustible materials, or damaged fire safety equipment (i.e. they will be also checking fire doors and ensuring risers are closed).

I have a disability which impairs my movement – what should I do in the event of a fire?

Personal Emergency Evacuation plans are currently in place with residents who are older, are mobility impaired, or are otherwise prevented from leaving the building easily. We are contacting these residents to ensure their needs are met in case of an alarm.

When will the safety patrols begin and how long will it go on for?

You will see the fire wardens active immediately. It is likely that the safety patrols will be in place for several months. EVML are also looking at how they can adapt the fire alarm system in each block so that each apartment will link to the main system. EVML have already started this process and we'll keep you updated about the progress and expected timescale. If this is done, it will mean the additional patrols will not be needed. If anything changes we'll let you know.

I'm currently trying to sell my home. What does this mean for me?

You will need an EWS1 form if you are selling your home, re-mortgaging or staircasing. The fire engineers will not be able to sign a compliant EWS1 form until further investigation work and remedial work has taken place.

We know how important it is to get this work completed as soon as possible and are working with EVML to develop a timetable. We expect it will take approximately six months to evaluate and prepare for any remedial work. At this stage it is difficult to estimate how long remedial works might take, but it might be up to a year.

We know how important this information is and we'll keep you updated about the progress.

Will this affect my service charge?

Usually, the cost of EVML's services are added to your service charge. This is an exceptional situation, and the Triathlon board will consider the treatment of any costs related to building defects. We know how important this issue is and will update you about this as soon as we can. Please be assured that Triathlon will look at all available options to protect residents from additional costs.

Will you need to do work in my property?

We don't yet know all the technical details and how remediation work will be done. When we get more information about this, we'll let you know.

When do you foresee us getting an EWS1?

It is likely that EVML will have fire engineers advising on the remedial works. The buildings will be signed off when remedial work is completed. An EWS1 form will be completed then. We will keep you updated about this.

What options are open for those of us who can't move, but can't stay?

This is a really difficult time for some people, especially those who are in the process of moving or need to move for work or family commitments. Subletting your home is an option. Please contact us if you would like more information about this.

Our agreements with our funders (government and banks) do not allow us to buy-back shares in your home.

Where can I get further advice or help?

If you have any further questions, please contact info@triathlonhomes.com