



Members Information Note – External Wall Systems Form EWS1

Introduction

This note has been produced by Council to make members aware of this new form which is in circulation at present. Those members who are also members of the IFE will have received a guidance note from them recently on the same subject. The IFE guidance note is comprehensive, but Council felt that it was appropriate to issue our own information note to all our members so that those who haven't dual membership are made aware.

Background

Form EWS1 has been developed by three organisations that are involved in property finance, development, management, valuation and marketing. The organisations involved are Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS), The Building Societies Association (BSA) and UK Finance all of which are directly linked to the activities mentioned above and who have a vested interest in properties including high rise residential buildings.

These organisations have agreed to an industry-wide process that is to be used by valuers, lenders, building owners and fire safety experts for valuing high-rise properties.

One of the reasons given for the production of the form is for mortgage approval, valuation and insurance on high rise blocks of flats that have external walls and balconies that may have combustible materials.

Members should note that at no time did RICS or the other organisations involved consult or discuss this form with the Institute or any other fire related professional bodies including the IFE.

Form EWS 1

RICS states that the form is 'intended for recording in a consistent manner what assessment has been carried out for the external wall construction of residential apartment buildings where the highest floor is 18 metres (six storeys) or more above ground level or where specific concerns exist. It should not be used for other purposes. It is to be completed by a competent person'. The form itself provides explanatory notes and definitions.

The review needs to be of the entire building or block and cannot be carried out for individual flats / apartments.

The form states that it applies to residential buildings that are more than 18m in height or where there are specific concerns, although in practice the form could be provided for other buildings if required. Only one assessment will be needed for each building or block and this will be valid for five years.

The process is about carrying out an appropriate investigation by a 'competent person' to ensure that the risk of fire spread over or within the external surfaces is acceptably low. The form states that this is a 'review' for the sole use and exclusivity of the commissioning or client organisation, and no responsibility is accepted to any third party for the whole or any part if its contents. These would mainly be organisations like property valuers and mortgage lenders but may also include building owners, managing agents or the contractors who build them etc.

Although it is stated that the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) is supportive of the approach, members should note that the form has no direct link to Government and is a marketing tool with no legislative status whatsoever.

The form refers specifically to the current regulatory framework in England and Wales although its use is currently being discussed in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

The Process

The process of carrying out a fire safety assessment of material combustibility is set out in the form. There are two options - Option A and Option B and these have to be conducted by a suitably qualified and competent professional.

Assessors who complete and sign Option A should be building professionals who are member of one of the professional institutions in the construction industry listed in the form. The assessors who can complete Option B should be members of a relevant professional body that deals with fire safety in the built environment. This could be a Chartered Engineer with the Institution of Fire Engineers or equivalent. In other words, in Option B, the fire engineer is being asked to certify that the building complies with the functional requirements of the Building Regulations applicable to the building.

Notes contained in the form explain in detail what is expected of the assessor carrying out the review for each option.

Guidance for Members

Our technical Sub Group Chairman has received several queries from members about this form. Amongst these are questions about the legality of the form, who can fill it in and what qualifications are needed. Hopefully, this note will answer most of those questions but for the sake of clarity, we would want members to note that the form is not a part of UK legislation.

Although it is claimed that it has no legal status, members need to be aware that any review and process carried out by them in a professional capacity, and any form signed by them (not just this one) may, inevitably, have consequences ‘down the line’.

It is likely that in the future, there will be more people seeking fire professionals to carry out these reviews and they will be asking members to assess buildings and then complete the form. We predict that the form will also start to be used for all buildings with external wall systems no matter what the height, especially after the Government’s latest advice notes where they recommend surveys of residential buildings no matter what height they are.

It is up to individual members to take decisions on their own about what work they carry out including reviews and completion of the EWS1 forms. However, the Institute’s Council strongly advises all members to consider if they have the correct training, qualifications, expertise, competency and membership of a relevant professional body to carry out these reviews.

Please remember that being on the Institute’s TFRAR register does not in itself qualify you for carrying out these reviews.

Council would also urge members who wish to engage in these reviews to check carefully their professional indemnity insurance to ensure they are covered for this particular work.

Members are also reminded of the Institute’s Code of Ethics and Discipline especially Section 3. A copy of this document is posted on the website at www.ifsm.org.uk under ‘Governance’.

D White (President) and R Docherty (Chairman)

for and on behalf of IFSM Council.