

Fire safety: Every fire victim is one too many

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Every fire victim is one too many, writes Quentin de Hults.



Quentin de Hults

Europe has achieved substantial improvements in fire safety, with fire fatalities dropping by 65 per cent over the last 30 years, but recent tragic events have rightly triggered renewed attention on how to improve fire safety in Europe.

As Executive Chair of the Modern Building Alliance, I believe all stakeholders must intensify their efforts to find and implement effective solutions. As representatives of the plastic industry in the construction sector, we are committed to playing our part.

To facilitate the exchange of best practices, the European Commission set up the Fire Information Exchange Platform (FIEP) in September last year.

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FIEP has identified five workstreams to focus on. The most instrumental will be the first one, on statistical data. Currently data from different countries can be incomplete and is not necessarily based on harmonised definitions and methodologies.

If we want to work together to improve fire safety, we need to start by speaking the same language. Existing statistics show that the change in rate of fire deaths varies between member states. Analysing these differences will help us to recognise best practices.

More comprehensive and comparable data will give the EU and national governments the opportunity to better identify the most effective fire safety measures.

The domestic environment should be a clear focus - there is room for improvement with easily and readily implementable measures.

For instance, smoke alarms provide a critical early warning at negligible cost; however, only some member states have made them mandatory in housing. In addition, sprinklers should be considered in some situations such as high-rises and high-risk buildings.

Finally, awareness campaigns and prevention work by fire brigades have been shown to be very efficient.

It's the responsibility of the whole construction value chain to ensure the proper use of products and therefore compliance with national building regulations.

As manufacturers, we should all be willing to engage with stakeholders and policymakers to find the most appropriate solutions to ensure our products deliver their maximum benefits with regards to performance, safety and sustainability.

The Modern Building Alliance and its members will closely monitor the conclusions of the investigation on the Grenfell Tower fire and stand ready to respond in an appropriate way when it comes to fire safety in high rise buildings.

Setting up FIEP was a crucial step and our industry is committed to contributing to this constructive dialogue.

We encourage member states and other stakeholders to do the same. Local authorities, fire safety professionals and industry must work together to collect accurate data, identify best practices and ensure recommendations are widely shared and implemented.

We ask MEPs to support FIEP and to champion solutions to increase awareness, prevention, detection and protection.

By doing so, I believe they will effectively continue to improve fire safety in Europe.

About the author

Quentin de Hults is Executive Chair of the Modern Building Alliance

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