

External Walls

PAS 9980:2022 gives recommendations and guidance on undertaking a fire risk appraisal of external wall construction and cladding of an existing multi-story, multi-occupied residential building. A fire risk appraisal of external wall construction and cladding is described in this PAS as a fire risk appraisal of external walls (FRAEW).

The purpose of an FRAEW is to assess the risk to occupants from a fire spreading over or within the external walls of the building and decide whether, in the specific circumstances of the building, remediation or other mitigating measures to address the risk are considered necessary.

The PAS applies where the risk is known, or suspected, to arise from the form of construction used for the external wall build-up, such as the presence of combustible materials. The outcome of an FRAEW is intended to inform fire risk assessments (FRAs) of multistorey, multi-occupied residential buildings and other types of buildings, including student accommodation, sheltered and other specialized housing and buildings converted into flats, where the evacuation strategy will be similar in nature to a purpose-built block of flats.

Following FIA guidance on The Issue of Cladding and External Wall Construction in Fire Risk Assessments for Multi Occupied Residential Premises, The FIA strongly recommend that, unless fire risk assessors' feel confident to give definitive advice on the nature and fire hazard of external wall construction, and have the appropriate qualifications, skills, knowledge and experience, they exclude assessment of the fire hazard of external wall construction and cladding from the scope of the fire risk assessments that they carry out under the Fire Safety Order, in which case it will be necessary for the action plan of the fire risk assessment to recommend an appraisal of the external wall construction by specialists in accordance with PAS9980.

The FRAEW should be carried out by a specialist using the Principals and Scope of the Fire Risk Appraisal of External Wall System (Section 7). This assessment should show how the external wall construction supports the overall intent of Requirement B4 in Part B of Schedule 1 to the Building Regulations 2010 in England and Requirement B4 in Part B of Schedule 1 of the Building Regulations 2015 in Wales, namely that "the external walls of the building shall adequately resist the spread of fire over the walls and from one building to another, having regard to the height, use and location of the building". In this connection, the assessment should address this functional requirement (regardless of the height of the building) and not just the recommendations set out in the guidance that supports the Regulations (e.g. Approved Document B

under the Regulations). The assessment should not just comprise a statement of either compliance or non-compliance with the functional requirement or the guidance but should include a clear statement on the level of risk and its acceptability. This assessment by specialists should take into account a number of factors, including, but not necessarily limited to:

- The type of evacuation strategy used in the building, i.e. simultaneous, staged, phased or 'stay put' and the anticipated evacuation time should evacuation becomes necessary.
- Suitability of the facilities for firefighting, including firefighting access for the fire and rescue service.
- The construction of the external walls, including any cladding and its method of fixing.
- The presence, and appropriate specification of, cavity barriers.
- The height of the building.
- The vulnerability of residents.
- Exposure of external walls or cladding to an external fire.
- Fire protection measures within the building (e.g. compartmentation, automatic fire suppression, automatic fire detection).
- Apparent quality of construction, or presence of building defects.
- The combustibility of the building structure and the use of modern methods of construction, such as timber framing, CLT etc.
- The location of escape routes.
- The complexity of the building.
- The premises' emergency plan, including an assessment of the adequacy of any staffing levels for the type of evacuation method employed.

The assessment is likely to take account of information on any approval of the building (and alterations to the building) under the Building Regulations, and information on external wall construction and any cladding available from the Responsible Person (e.g. in operation and maintenance manuals, or handed over for compliance with Regulation 38 of the Building Regulations); It is unlikely that an EWS form will provide adequate assurance on its own.