



User Name: AYCEID ServicetoService

Date and Time: Thursday, May 7, 2020 7:30:00 AM EDT

Job Number: 116287718

Document (1)

1. How the Grenfell Tower disaster unfolded;At first it seemed the blaze was controllable, but then the cladding caught fire and flames engulfed the building with devastating speed· What we know so far· London fire - latest developments· Visual guide: what happened?· Full story

How the Grenfell Tower disaster unfolded; At first it seemed the blaze was controllable, but then the cladding caught fire and flames engulfed the building with devastating speed. What we know so far. London fire - latest developments. Visual guide: what happened?. Full story

The Guardian(London)

June 14, 2017 Wednesday 2:28 PM GMT

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theguardian

Section: UK NEWS; Version:2

Length: 1461 words

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Body

By the time Mahad Egal and his family, including two small children, escaped from their fourth floor flat in Grenfell Tower, it was just before 1am. "We were one of the first 10 families who got out no later than 1.10am, and at this point the fire was no higher than an average tree," he said. It seemed it was "controllable". But then, he added, the cladding on the building caught fire.

Horried witnesses woken by screams, sirens and helicopters in west London would see the flames engulf the 24-storey building, which had up to 600 people inside, with devastating speed.

"There were people jumping out of the place, a man who threw two of his children out," Egal said, dazed and tearful as he described the horror to the BBC.

Sixteen hours later, with smoke still rising from the smouldering, blackened husk of the block containing 120 homes, the death toll was confirmed at 12, a number expected to rise, with others still missing.

The first 999 call to the London fire brigade was made at 12.54am, with the Metropolitan police called at 1.16am. Forty fire engines sped to north Kensington. Pictures show that by then one side of the recently refurbished building was fully ablaze.

Jody Martin, who lives nearby, grabbed an axe from a fire truck. He looked, in vain, for a fire escape. Eventually, he gained entry to the second floor, but once in the corridor was confronted with choking smoke so thick he doubted anyone could have left the building without assistance. "I watched one person falling out. I watched another woman holding her baby out of the window ... hearing screams, I was yelling to everyone to get down and they were saying: 'We can't leave our apartments, the smoke is too bad on the corridors,'" he told the BBC.

People in pyjamas, shoeless, in boxer shorts, were running out of the blazing building in panic, as the flames swept rapidly upwards.

On the street, there was speculation the fire had been caused by an exploding fridge on the fourth floor.

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One man on the 17th floor, awoken by the fire engines at around 1.15am, peered out of his window, saw the fire "blazing up" and woke his aunt. By the time the two managed to get downstairs, "the fire was just about reaching our windows on the 17th floor", he said. "The whole side of the building was on fire. The cladding went up like a matchstick." There was no fire alarm, no integrated fire system, he said.

Samira Lamrani, 38, saw a baby thrown from a ninth or 10th floor window. "The windows were slightly ajar. A woman was gesturing that she was about to throw her baby and if somebody could catch her baby. Somebody did, a gentleman ran forward and managed to grab the baby. I could see people from all angles, banging and screaming for help."

Another witness, Joe Walsh, 58, saw a parent on the fifth or sixth floor make the same desperate decision. "I saw the parent throw two kids out of the window." He was not sure if they survived. A resident, called Zara, heard a woman on the fifth or sixth floor screaming: "My baby, my baby. I need to get out, I need to save my baby." "But we were just looking up. We couldn't do anything," she told the BBC.

The desperation was evident, with people tying bedsheets together to make escape ropes, flashing torches, leaning out of windows to breathe away from the acrid smoke filling the block, said witnesses. "There were people who were just surviving ... and waiting for the fire to take them, just waiting to die," said Denise Bloomfield, 37, evacuated from a nearby flat. "They were taking in air from the window."

Others jumped. "People were screaming and you could hear massive thuds and people were just jumping off, trying desperately to save their lives," eyewitness Emma told Sky News.

Down on the street, others were screaming, "Don't jump. Don't jump. Stay indoors," said Paul, a resident who escaped. He managed to make it down the stairs, as firefighters were coming up. In the end, firefighters managed to rescue 65 people, but the search for others is continuing.

Footage shot by eyewitnesses shows people trapped inside, waving torches from the tower's upper floors, their silhouettes clearly showing young children among them. One by one, lights went out as the rooms filled with smoke, or the power failed.

There were explosions everywhere, said Michael Paramasivan, 37, who escaped from the seventh floor with his partner and child. "About 13 floors up I saw three children waving at a window, and then there was just an explosion and they disappeared," he told the Press Association. "They were three kids, they were banging on the windows, you could see their silhouettes and then, bang, it just went up."

As police and firefighters fought to gain access, some using riot shields to protect themselves from red-hot debris showering down, those who had staggered out were saying they had been told to stay put. The advice issued to residents in the event of fire was to stay in the flats, said Paramasivan. "If we had listened to them and stayed in the flat, we'd have perished."

The first official public confirmation of the unfolding tragedy came at 2.45am, when emergency services said firefighters were tackling a "large" blaze and police said two people had been treated for smoke inhalation. The unimaginable scale of the disaster was already apparent to those living nearby. "It's unbearable, hearing someone screaming for their lives," tweeted Fabio Bebber.

Nearby churches, mosques, sports centres and social clubs opened their doors to evacuated residents. Neighbours brought food, clothing and toys for people who had lost all their material possessions. "Water, clothes, anything they have got to help," said the actor and writer Tim Downie, who lives nearby.

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For those searching for loved ones and friends, police set up a casualty bureau.

Reports of the missing included a 12-year-old girl, separated from her family as they fled from the 20th floor. The whereabouts of three sisters, the youngest aged three, and their parents was also unknown.

Sitting inside one makeshift shelter, Line Sterring, 23, from Denmark, who lives next to the tower, said that by 1.30am "the flames gradually wrapped themselves around the building".

"We could see people waving fairy lights and flags to show their positions." At first people had been calm, Sterring said, but then they saw the smoke and panicked. "We saw people in the second top window of the tower. There were four people screaming and shouting and then the window went completely dark from the smoke and that part of the building was covered in flames."

Three hours after the alarm was raised, the London mayor, Sadiq Khan, tweeted: "Major incident declared at Grenfell Tower in Kensington." Police were then confirming a "number of people" were being treated for a range of injuries.

By 8am, it was confirmed that 50 people had been taken to hospital and there were a "number of fatalities". "We will soon be making contact with next of kin," said the Met police commander Stuart Cundy. This was, the "devastated" mayor acknowledged, a "rapidly changing situation" - the numbers were likely to rise. Around 250 firefighters, 20 ambulances, 100 medics and 100 police officers were at the scene. The London fire commissioner, Dany Cotton, said it was "an unprecedented incident" in her 29 years' experience.

Firefighters made progress, but it was not until 9.45am that it was confirmed they had reached the 21st floor. One described never having seen a fire like it: "It was surreal." They were exhausted, having worked for 12 hours non-stop. By 5pm, they had managed to get to the very top floor, having been hampered by fractured gas pipes.

With the fire under control - although there were still areas ablaze late into the afternoon - the priority was searching the building, but it was made clear there was little hope of finding survivors.

The first indication of the terrible human cost was announced shortly after midday. The Metropolitan police confirmed six fatalities, but stressed "these are very early stages and we do expect that figure to rise". In addition, 75 people were being treated in London hospitals, 18 of them said to be in critical care.

In the refuge and rescue centres, the search continued for loved ones throughout the day. One man, looking for his sister, trapped with her two-year-old son, said: "It's not looking good, because I was chatting to her about 4am and she was trapped and there was smoke. At one point, the son collapsed because of the smoke and I told her: 'You've got to give him mouth to mouth.'" Another man, who lives on the 14th floor, was searching for his friend. They had spoken at 3.30am. "He was saying: 'Please help me. Please tell my family I love them.' He sounded very scared."

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Publication-Type: Newspaper

Journal Code: WEBGNS

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Subject: FIRES (87%); FAMILY (74%); CHILDREN (74%); 2017 GRENFELL TOWER FIRE (73%); EMERGENCY SERVICES (72%); WITNESSES (71%); FIRE DEPARTMENTS (62%); POLICE FORCES (50%)

Industry: EMERGENCY VEHICLES (87%); BUILDING RENOVATION (66%); HELICOPTERS (51%)

Geographic: LONDON, ENGLAND (70%)

Load-Date: June 14, 2017

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