



User Name: AYCEID ServicetoService

Date and Time: Thursday, May 7, 2020 7:29:00 AM EDT

Job Number: 116287679

Document (1)

1. Grenfell Tower: 12 dead in fire that destroyed 24-storey building;Police expect death toll to rise further as search continues and firefighters say they will be at site of blaze through the nightLondon fire - latest updatesWhat we know so farFire engulfs the Grenfell - in pictures

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London fire - latest updates

What we know so far

Fire engulfs the Grenfell - in pictures

The Guardian(London)

June 14, 2017 Wednesday 2:51 AM GMT

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theguardian

Section: UK NEWS; Version:9

Length: 1359 words

Byline: Sandra Laville, Alice Ross, Alexandra Topping, Damien Gayle and Jamie Grierson

Body

Firefighters and police were searching through the still smouldering debris of a tower block inferno in London to retrieve bodies as police warned the death toll of 12 would rise in the coming hours.

Hundreds of people have made desperate calls to a specially created casualty bureau to report missing loved ones in the aftermath of the blaze, which ripped through the 24-storey Grenfell Tower in west London.

Commander Stuart Cundy of the Metropolitan police said a full search of the building was taking place but it was not anticipated there would be any survivors found inside: "The thoughts of all of us from the emergency services... and from all of London, our thoughts will be with those so affected by a fire on a scale that is unprecedented," he said.

Amid scenes of anger and recriminations residents said their concerns about fire safety in the building over many years and during a £10m refurbishment last year, had been ignored by the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea and the block's management company.

Related: Missing residents of Grenfell Tower fire in west London

In a blog David Collins of the Grenfell action group said: " ALL OUR WARNINGS FELL ON DEAF EARS and we predicted that a catastrophe like this was inevitable and just a matter of time."

Housing activists called the tower block fire a tragedy that was the result of a "combination of government cuts, local authority mismanagement, and sheer contempt for council tenants and the homes they live in".

Throughout the day, the families and friends of residents desperately put out messages on social media searching for any news of their loved ones. A 12-year-old girl, a family with three children, and an 82-year-old man were among the missing. Several hundred people would have been in the block sleeping when the fire took hold.

The London ambulance service said 68 patients were being treated in six hospitals, 18 were in critical care wards.

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The prime minister, Theresa May, promised a "proper investigation" saying that if any lessons are to be learned they will be, and "action will be taken".

Emma Dent Coad, the newly elected Labour MP for Kensington, said the terrible events had devastated the community. "Local people have been streaming into support centres with clothes, food and other supplies to help those affected. It is at times like these that we see the very best of our community, coming together in the face of such adversity," she said.

At three rest centres across west London distraught people were being comforted and supported. Up to 44 families have been placed in emergency accommodation by the council and many more are being supported in rest centres.

At St Clement and St James Church, the Rev Mark O'Donoghue, said the church was trying to find hotel rooms and bedding for people. "One of the saddest things has been seeing people who have come from one (refuge) centre to another centre, trying to find their loved ones," he said.

Sadiq Khan, the mayor of London, said legitimate questions had to be answered, including over the fire safety strategy for the building, which told residents to stay put inside their flat if a blaze broke out.

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"There are genuine concerns, reasonable concerns, that have been raised in the course of the night and it's really important that these questions are answered," said Khan.

"I will be demanding answers and I can assure you I will be ensuring there is independence in relation to it. Across London we have many, many tower blocks and what we can't have is a situation where people's safety is put at risk because of bad advice being given or if it is the case, as has been alleged, of tower blocks not being properly serviced or maintained."

As smoke billowed from the building and pockets of fire continued to break out, Steve Apter of the London fire brigade described the unprecedented nature of the inferno. The first commander on the scene shortly after 1am had been faced with a blaze that spread with a scale and speed greater than he would have anticipated.

Late on Wednesday firefighters were continuing to face arduous conditions inside the tower block. Drones supplied by Kent fire brigade were used to fly up and down the building to help fire fighters and forensics teams as they picked through rubble, ash, timber and concrete in a detailed search.

"This incident continues to be a challenging one," said Apter. "We intend to be here until the job is done, working alongside colleagues in the London ambulance service. We certainly intend to be here through the night."

Apter would not comment on the causes of the fire. He said a full investigation would be set up by fire and police investigators.

"The fire was unprecedented in its scale and spread and is the subject of a full investigation with police. Lessons learnt will be brought out not just across London, but across the UK and globally," he said.

Some experts said the cladding fixed to the block during a £10m refurbishment last year might be responsible for the speed with which it took hold.

Dr Jim Glocking, technical director of the Fire Protection Association (FPA), an industry body, said a major issue was that insulation underneath cladding on the outside of tower blocks did not need to be fireproof.

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The FPA had "lobbied long and hard" for building regulations on the issue to be changed, but nothing had happened.

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Nick Hurd, the policing and fire minister, said checks would be carried out on tower blocks going through similar refurbishments.

The scale of the horror residents faced continued to emerge throughout the day. Witnesses described seeing mothers throw children to safety, people who were on fire jumping from windows and residents waving and screaming for help using mobile phone lights and torches as distress signals.

"The flames, I have never seen anything like it, it just reminded me of 9/11," said Mua Ali, 45. "The fire started on the upper floors... Oh my goodness, it spread so quickly, it had completely spread within half an hour.

"My friends live on the fourth floor, someone knocked on their door, they didn't know and they got out. They have three children. Some people were knocking on doors but the people inside didn't open the door."

Samira Lamrani said she saw a woman gesturing to the crowd below that she was about to drop her baby from "the ninth or 10th floor" of the building. A man ran forward and managed to catch the baby, she said.

Joe Walsh, 58, said he saw children being thrown from the windows. "I saw the parent throw two kids out of the window. I don't know where they landed because I was on the other side. I doubt anyone caught them, I hope they did."

"It was the screaming that was the worst and I could hear that from the ground. All I could hear was 'help, help, help'," said Anne Waters.

At its height 200 firefighters tackled the blaze, supported by 40 engines and a range of specialist vehicles, including 14 fire rescue vehicles, she said. In addition, at least 20 ambulance crews were in attendance.

Many of those who escaped the flames gathered at the nearby Rugby Portobello centre where they were given water, clothes and blankets.

Businesses at the nearby Notting Dale Village brought trolleys of refreshments, including sandwiches and fruit to the emergency services working at the cordons around Grenfell Tower. The manager, Hayley Allen, said: "We have a local community focus and wanted to help and show our support in whatever way we could."

Volunteers stood on the edge of the exclusion zone with trays of sandwiches, which were offered to police as they walked past.

Marco Antoniadis, who owns MGA Autos on Latimer Road near Grenfell Tower, said: "Everyone is walking round in shock. I've seen a couple of friends nearly in tears in other garages round here. Like in most places in England people get together and help each other in times like this and that's what we're trying to do."

If you are concerned for loved ones the police have set up an emergency line: 0800 0961 233

Classification

Grenfell Tower: 12 dead in fire that destroyed 24-storey building; Police expect death toll to rise further as search continues and firefighters say they will b....

Language: ENGLISH

Publication-Type: Newspaper

Journal Code: WEBGNS

Subject: 2017 GRENFELL TOWER FIRE (87%); EMERGENCY SERVICES (72%); POLICE FORCES (72%); CITY GOVERNMENT (70%); DEATH & DYING (67%); FIRE PREVENTION & SAFETY (67%); CHILDREN (66%); NEGATIVE BUSINESS NEWS (65%); FAMILY (63%); SOCIAL MEDIA (60%)

Industry: SOCIAL MEDIA (60%)

Geographic: LONDON, ENGLAND (90%)

Load-Date: June 14, 2017

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