

1. Key Messages

- 1.1 The Fire Safety Bill seeks to ensure that people feel safe in their homes and the Home Office believes that this Bill will help bring about meaningful change to improving building safetyⁱ. **This is the exact ethos of Electrical Safety First as we are the only UK charity dedicated to reducing deaths, fires and injuries caused by domestic electrical accidents and incidents.**
- 1.2 Electricity causes more than **14,000 house fires a year** – almost half of all accidental house firesⁱⁱ. Every year, thousands are injured due to electrical accidents and incidents, and those who tragically lose their lives in fires caused by electricity are disproportionately the elderly and vulnerable.
- 1.3 Given that electricity accounts for over half of all accidental domestic fires in the UK, tackling the causes with appropriate preventative measures has the potential to not only prevent the associated high personal and financial costs, but also to reduce the pressure placed upon the emergency services.
- 1.4 We have frequently voiced our concerns about electrical safety in tower blocks/multi-occupied residential buildings to UK Government, particularly following the tragedy of Grenfell Tower.ⁱⁱⁱ This included our calls for mandatory electrical safety checks in all tower blocks and the potential for a register of white goods operating in these properties to be held by the respective building management companies. These calls have not yet been addressed.
- 1.5 **Electrical Safety First urges Members of Parliament during the Second Reading stage of the Bill to consider improving it by making amendments to include these two items, to ensure we prevent fires in people's homes caused by electricity.**

2. Background

- 2.1 **In England, 53% of all electrical dwelling fires are caused by an electrical source of ignition.**^{iv} The Charity supports the Fire Kills campaign, and co-runs Electrical Fire Safety Week with the Home Office each year to raise awareness of things that cause electrical fires in UK homes^v with members of the public. However, we believe additional measures are needed to protect people from fires caused by electricity.
- 2.2 Whilst the Fire Safety Bill aims to amend the Fire Safety Order 2005 to clarify that the responsible person or duty-holder for a multi-occupied residential building must manage risk for structure / external walls, cladding, balconies and windows – **we believe that this legislation should consider the source of fires in the first place – electricity.**
- 2.3 Recent tragic events have demonstrated the fatal risk electrical accidents and incidents pose to people in their own homes, particularly in high-density housing such as tower blocks. Whilst other factors accelerated the fire, it must be highlighted that the primary cause of the Grenfell Tower fire was an electrical fault.^{vi}
- 2.4 There are around 4,000 tower blocks in England, estimated to contain over 480,000 individual flats^{vii}. Unless **every unit** in a high-rise building is subject to the same safety regime, everyone in the building can be placed at risk from a single flat. Therefore, any measure to improve electrical safety in multi-occupied buildings can help protect **hundreds of thousands of people.**
- 2.5 Electrical Safety First has worked to ensure tenants living in the Private Rented Sector are protected by mandatory five yearly electrical safety checks in their properties,

recently brought into law. **Such measures are crucial in bringing down the number of electrical accidents and incidents, and we believe now is the time to include individual dwellings within tower blocks in this regime - regardless of tenure.**

- 2.6 Whilst we appreciate that this is a short Bill that will amend the Fire Safety Order 2005 which focuses on non-domestic measures, the Fire Safety Bill also amends this Order in domestic homes. This means that homes within high-rise blocks are affected by the proposed legislation, and this offers an excellent and straightforward opportunity to ensure that all who live in such buildings are brought under the same safety regime.

3. White Goods Safety in Tower Blocks

- 3.1 There have been numerous, large scale and high-profile white good product recalls over the last few years, which have highlighted the inadequate nature of the current product recall system in the UK. Some of these recalls have very sadly led to fatalities.

- 3.2 **Three high profile incidents involving white goods have taken place in London's tower blocks over recent years, including Shepherds Court^{viii}, Lakanal House^{ix} and Grenfell Tower^x – all have been confirmed or have been alleged to have been caused by electrical goods. Shepherds' Court was a tumble dryer that was subject to a safety notice and then subsequently recalled.**

- 3.3 **In 2017, following the Grenfell tragedy, Electrical Safety First urged the Government to improve electrical safety checks in tower blocks and to put in place measures for a building management companies to hold a register of white goods operating in these properties – but no action has been taken by the UK Government to date.**

- 3.4 Whilst Electrical Safety First has been working with industry, Fire and rescue Services and the Office for Product Safety and Standards to help resolve this, this Bill can improve the safety of tower blocks by being pro-active in identifying unsafe recalled electrical goods operating in flats within tower blocks. At present, there could be unchecked electrical goods operating in these buildings. It only takes one single dangerous faulty unchecked product to place **everyone in the entire building at risk.**

- 3.5 Given this, we believe that the newly created role of a responsible person for any high building should be given the task of **compiling a register of every white good^{xi} in the building.** This ensures that when a recall occurs, anyone with an affected appliance can be quickly alerted, and the safety risk resolved.

- 3.6 **Relying on consumers to register and respond to recalls in these buildings when the potential risk is so high must be considered wholly inadequate.**

4. Electrical Safety First: Our solutions

- 4.1 Whilst Electrical Safety First believes that the Government needs to introduce a number of measures to improve electrical safety in UK homes^{xii} including a strategy to reduce electrical fires, and provide support for vulnerable people who are unable to afford electrical safety improvements - **amending this Bill provides the opportunity to make immediate differences to people who live in multi-occupied buildings.**

- 4.2 **Therefore Electrical Safety First recommends two key measures be amended into the Bill:**

1. Tower blocks / multi-occupied residential buildings must be subject to **mandatory electrical safety checks every 5 years regardless of tenure**. Records of this must be kept by the responsible person and made available to Fire and Rescue Services, Local Authorities and resident's associations upon request.
 2. The responsible person or duty holder (Management Company) must keep a **register of white goods** in the building and ensure that they are registered with the manufacturer for recall.
- 4.3 **We hope that the above measures can be incorporated into the Bill and we ask MPs to seriously consider these issues as part of Second Reading of the Fire Safety Bill.**

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Should you have any questions at all please do not hesitate to contact us at: policy@electricalsafetyfirst.org.uk or by telephone on 07970 091373

ⁱ Home Office Press Release – 19 March 2020 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/fire-safety-bill>

ⁱⁱ Electrical Safety First analysis of Home Office Statistics 2018-19 <https://www.electricalsafetyfirst.org.uk/what-we-do/our-policies/westminster/statistics-england/>

ⁱⁱⁱ Letter to Margot James – Grenfell Tower <https://www.electricalsafetyfirst.org.uk/media/mu5fbakf/300617-margot-james-grenfell-tower.pdf>

^{iv} Electrical Safety First analysis of Home Office Statistics 2018-19 <https://www.electricalsafetyfirst.org.uk/what-we-do/our-policies/westminster/statistics-england/>

^v <https://www.electricalsafetyfirst.org.uk/what-we-do/electrical-fire-safety-week/>

^{vi} <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-46363830>

^{vii} English Housing Survey 2018-19 <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-housing-survey-2018-to-2019-headline-report>

^{viii} Shepherds Court Fire – BBC News, 27 August 2016 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-37203933>

^{ix} Lakanal House Fire – BBC News <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-england-london-21964603/lakanal-house-fire-a-tragedy-waiting-to-happen>

^x Grenfell Tower Fire – Sky News <https://news.sky.com/story/grenfell-tower-inquiry-faulty-wiring-in-fridge-freezer-started-fire-says-expert-11565956>

^{xi} Major White Goods should include the key domestic appliances involved in electrical fires according to Home Office fire statistics: Fridge Freezers, washing machines, tumble dryers and dishwashers. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/fire-statistics-incident-level-datasets>

^{xii} <https://www.electricalsafetyfirst.org.uk/media/2287/uk-policy-messages-2019.pdf>