Lakanal House, London
July 3, 2009

Statistics

Type of fire
Hydrocarbon fire in a high-rise building

Ignition Source
Electrical fault with a television set

Duration of fire
Several hours

Number of casualties
6 Residence and over 90 families had to be evacuated

Cost to industry
Cost of lives, the attendance of the fire fighters and the rebuild of the building

Event
Fire initiated in flat 65 part of a 14 storey tower block built in 1959 housing 98 flats stretching almost 42m high. The building had been designed with escape balconies reaching to an enclosed central staircase. The council had prior to the event spent 3.5m on fire safety refurbishment measures.

The fire quickly broke out of flat 65 ensuing smoke out the window and radiating heat to the flat above in flat 79.

Where a resident Catherine Hickman called the fire authorities and was advised to remain inside until some 28 minutes later she was overcome from heat and smoke.

The principles of fire safety and firefighting in the UK are based on containment of the fire within a compartment.

Lessons Learned

In inquest into the event found London Fire Brigade personnel negligent failing to react to the situation informing residence to stay where they were. The jurors also concluded that it would have been possible for residence to escape without assistance, however, there was much confusion over the layout of the building and flat numbers which prevented firefighters getting to residence quickly.

It is therefore, important that there is a full understanding of how and why the fire developed and spread quickly to improve building design and technology installed within for passive and active protection. The fire development and fire spread was unusual in this case and the circumstances resulting in this event are still unknown.

Southwark Council has since recommended a review of their policies concerning fire risk assessments of high-rise buildings and training for staff, liaising with emergency services.

References
