

Andrew Gilligan's excellent '*We won the battle of the wharf*' (Evening Standard 22nd September 2008) highlights the potential complacency that can apply to parts of the UK construction industry and the consequent risks to the structure that may impact upon levels of fire safety. It is an aspect that the Passive Fire Protection Federation (PFPF) has sought to raise at the highest level based on feedback from our members.

In a well regulated economy with a huge emphasis placed on health and safety we tend to assume buildings are as they should be - safe and sound. If we pay £650,000 for a beautiful, well appointed penthouse we don't expect corners to be cut and we don't expect it to be a death trap.

We rely on builders to build safely, *and the regulations and authorities to make sure they do*. But as this article clearly shows our assumptions that all buildings are safe and meet current building regulations are not always well founded. Our only real protection is knowledge. *Homeowners need to think about fire safety and ask questions. If the public know what should be there, they can ask the right questions.*

The principles of 'passive' fire safety are to design buildings so people can get out and the fire service get in, and out again, without loss of life. Did those responsible for this building consider passive fire protection *in their risk assessment?* It's unlikely. Passive, or built-in fire protection, uses the structure itself to provide fire separation and compartmentation to stop fire spreading so that fire is contained to the point of origin. In effect, passive fire protection provides the backbone of a building's fire protection and the foundation for safe escape. *To neglect passive fire protection is to take major risks with fire.*

The overriding principle is simple: if we design buildings with built-in fire safety by protecting the structure that we can all sleep far more easily in our beds