

PFPP letter to fire safety press re water supply (ref Merseyside Fire Service) 27.11.08

Fire Engineering and Insurance press

Fire rescue service may have water problems and unlikely to take risks needed.

Dear Sir

According to the Liverpool Daily Post (Mon 24 November 2009) Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service has threatened to challenge the local water supplier, United Utilities, in court, after "fire crews had complained about the lacklustre water pressure coming from the company's hydrants". The Post reports that United Utilities has apparently refused to increase the pressure and Merseyside Fire has drawn up plans to force the company to do more.

Although crews say they could cope with a domestic fire, there are fears a larger industrial inferno would stretch resources, already under pressure from, eg integrated risk management plans and the threat of regional control rooms. It's not good news. But the implications are also clear for the wider aspects of fire protection. All fire protection measures need to work together because circumstances may not unfold as expected when fire breaks out. If the water supply is vulnerable, it could affect fire fighting and any sprinklers systems installed.

It's not just the front, fire-fighting end we need to worry about. Fire-fighters take it on trust that a building they enter will have adequate built-in fire protection, to maintain its stability under fire so people can get out safely and they can get in. But the case of Pacific Wharf showed what a dangerous assumption this is. The luxury apartment development was recently in the news, having been found to lack even the most basic fire protection, making it a death trap for people living there. Although inspectors had passed the flats as having been constructed properly, there was no effective fire compartmentation, which could have risked the whole building.

There are general issues about fire safety awareness, from product manufacturers and engineers to designers, contractors and inspectors. The fire safety community needs to work together as a single entity. And it's important to take the wider perspectives into account. Surely it's critical if we cannot as a community place sufficient faith in the water supply? Joined up fire safety is what we should be concerned about, but right now there is a serious disconnect.

Yours sincerely,

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