



2020 is the year when we had to do things differently. As countries and communities around the world adjusted to life under lockdown, social distancing and wearing masks. Businesses were forced to either move to home working or had to close and this was the same in the standardization world. Slowly our standards developing organisations closed their offices and moved to home working. Conferences and meeting became virtual and we discovered that we could be very productive as well. Here we look at the impact on IFAN.

COVID 19 arrived in Europe early in the year and by February it became obvious that the IFAN Board would not be able to hold its annual Face 2 Face meeting in Geneva, flights and hotel bookings were cancelled and the meeting was changed to a virtual meeting. In fact the IFAN board held a series of shorter meetings instead of a 2 day F2F meetings.

## “We must all get used to the new normal” Ross Wraight, IFAN President.

### 47<sup>th</sup> IFAN Members Assembly

The topic that has been at the top of the Board’s agenda since March is the arrangements for the 47<sup>th</sup> IFAN Members’ Assembly [MA].

The German member of IFAN, ANP had offered to host the meeting with the kind assistance of DIN and the meeting was arranged to be held in Berlin 12-16 October 2020.

The Board has acknowledged that with the uncertainty around holding events that the best decision is to hold a shortened Members Assembly virtually.

The Board is currently discussing the best start time to allow as many members as possible to attend the even. With members in Australia, China, the USA and Europe finding a time suitable for all has proved difficult.

Our President has proposed that all the papers be read in advance and any presentations be circulated in advance so that only discussion fol-

lowing on from them need take place at the MA itself.

An invitation will be sent out as soon as the final arrangements have been made.

### Other Meetings

The 40<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the IFAN European Group was due to be held in Brussels on Monday 29<sup>th</sup> June, however it was decided that the meeting be a virtual half day meeting addressing the key topics on the Agenda. This proved to be a very efficient solution and all the topics on the agenda were discussed.

### SES Conference 2020

SES will be holding a virtual conference on 5-6 August, the conference will be held at 10.00-2.00pm Eastern Standard Time, it is to be free of charge to all delegates.

More details are available on the SES website.

[Link here](#)

On the 14 June 2017 a catastrophic fire broke out in the 24 storey Grenfell Tower in London, containing 129 flats (apartments). It is believed to have started in a flat on the fourth floor. The cause was an electrical fault in a fridge-freezer in the kitchen. Videos of the fire show its rapid spread up the outside of the building, and subsequent difficulty in containing it. The fire resulted in 72 deaths.

The Grenfell Tower Inquiry is examining the circumstances leading up to and surrounding the fire. It is in two phases. The first phase focused on an examination of the events of the evening the fire occurred. The second phase is examining 'the causes of these events, including how Grenfell Tower came to be in a condition which allowed the fire to spread in the way identified by Phase 1'. Evidence given so far has been from two professional consultant companies, the architect and the fire safety engineer for the design stage. Both were employed by the owner of Grenfell Tower.

Although at an early stage, and paused because of the Covid19 public health emergency, I have reflected on some recurring aspects of evidence given under examination and cross examination. My four reflections can apply to standards users

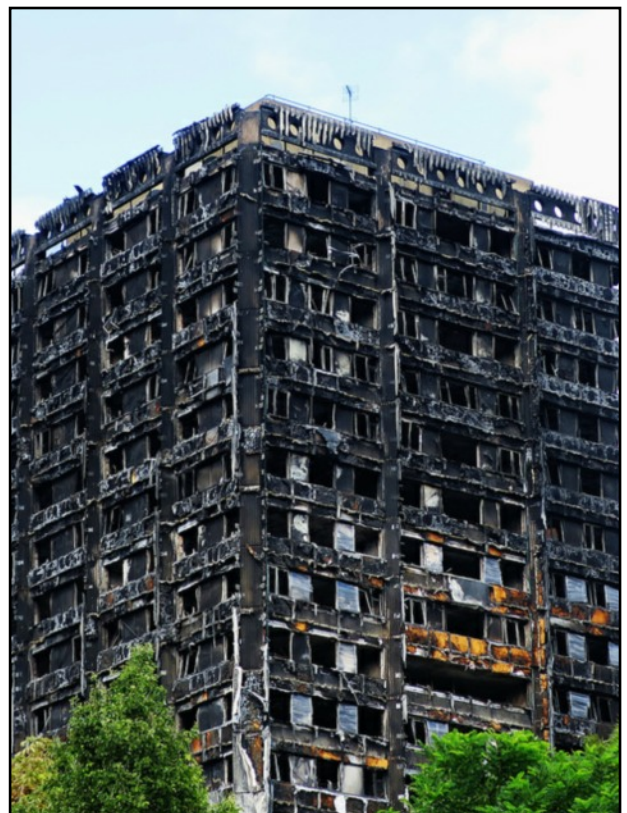
working in business sectors, not just construction, where a failure in health and safety would be devastating or catastrophic. Although the evidence was on behalf of two companies, they were represented in court by the individuals who had worked on the project at the time (one had since left their company).

### 1. Demonstrating competence.

Hopefully in our work we won't have to face a legal cross examination. The likelihood may be very low, but its impact is very high. Standards users who require the implementation of standards without understanding their purpose and application in the context of the specific use for which they are being used are likely to find themselves in a grave situation under examination and cross examination. Standards users acting in a professional capacity, especially in the UK if they are Registered in a regulated profession or Chartered, can expect to be questioned about the basis on which they use standards. Counsel for the Grenfell Tower Inquiry usually starts their examination of witnesses with the questions 'are you registered/chartered?', 'what is your professional experience (and knowledge) of the issues being examined?', 'do you undertake CPD (Continuing Professional Development)?', 'do you keep records of it?'

In the fifth in a series of articles, Keith Wilson reflects on the expectations on consultants and specifiers and their use of standards arising from evidence to date given to into the Grenfell Tower Inquiry.

Keith Wilson is a Construction Knowledge Consultant, Vice-Chair of British Standards Society and IFAN Treasurer.



2. Ignorance of primary and critical national standards. The Fire Safety consultant was appointed to provide a fire safety strategy report for the major improvement, refit and repairs project under examination. It was a company with broad experience in this field. Its sister company was one of the UK's largest UKAS accredited fire testing and research organisations. The consultant's project leader for the Grenfell Tower project had experience of major improvement, refit and repairs projects, a high level academic qualification in fire engineering, and a track record in their field in consultancy and regulatory approvals. They said in their fee proposal "In developing the report, we would use our expert knowledge of fire safety design codes". At the time of their consultancy, the standard BS PAS 911:2007 Fire strategies - guidance and framework for their formulation, was current. It is still current today.

Counsel asked the project leader "Can I just ask you to look at something. It's something called PAS 911 of 2007... . Have you heard of something like that"

Answer: "I don't - - I'm not familiar with that particular - -"

Question: "I'll show it to you... . It is not a British Standard, It's a PAS. You know the difference between the two?"

Answer: "Publicly available specification".

There followed some checking that the PAS's publication date pre-dated the project, which it did. Counsel carried on questioning, "Is this a document you and others at (the fire safety engineer) would have used at the time?"

Answer: "No".

Question: "It's not?"

Answer: "No".

Counsel then asked "If I could just ask you one or two questions on it" and proceeded with a forensic questioning of the project leader's knowledge and judgment of it.

Among the outcomes of this exchange for standards users generally is the necessity to be aware of all product- and project-applicable standards. If some are not used, have a clear rationale for the decision based on levels of understanding in the circumstances of their potential use.

3. Ignorance of current legislation, and due diligence for standards referenced in contract documents.

The architect was a BS ISO 9001 and 14001 assessed practice. Evidence was given by a Partner (joint owner) of the architect, their project leader and an architectural assistant. Counsel referred the project leader's witness statement in which he wrote "In the internal email I expressed my view that I felt (the architect) was 'a little green on process and technicality', because (the architect), as a practice, had not previously been involved in high-rise residential, heating renewal or the overcladding of occupied buildings". These are critical components in examining the failure of Grenfell Tower. The architectural assistant was responsible for design of the cladding system that failed in the fire. and its compliance with the England regulations. His architectural degree was from a Scottish university, where the curriculum covered the Scotland Building Regulations, not the England regulations. He abandoned his studies to become a registered (licensed) architect, but had studied in London before his abandonment. He also said he had extensive experience of designing in England with the England regulations, but offered no evidence of Continuing Professional Development.

In the UK, many buildings were specified using a national master specification, NBS. This specified 'the systemised building envelope' (the cladding), which is a principal focus of the Inquiry, through performance criteria and execution. As well as invoking British Standards, it also invokes a standard from the Centre for Window and Cladding Technology (CWCT). CWCT is regarded as expert in the field of window and cladding systems and products, a standards development organisation whose standard is also heavily referenced in government guidance deemed to satisfy the regulations.

Counsel questioned the architectural assistant about its use, as it was invoked in the project's NBS specification and in the government guidance. Here is a question and answer on the topic in which the respondent demonstrates they hadn't read the standard invoked in their specification and referenced in the legislation guidance. Counsel: "So can we take it that your understanding o(the architect's) role at the time was that even though the CWCT standard had been specified in the NBS spec, you left it to (the specialist cladding contractor) to be familiar with the standard?"

Reply: "Yeah, they were CWCT accredited, so they would know".

Counsel: "You didn't think it was any part of your role just to spot check by reference to that standard the work they had done?"

Reply: "Well, it was, by the fact it's in the specification, the employer's requirements, and they are required to meet that standard."

Counsel: "How would you go about checking whether they had done that if you hadn't read the CWCT".

Answer: "But I didn't have a role to check it; they had a role to comply to it. It's different".

#### 4. Putting cost before competence and capability.

The architect was already working on a school and leisure centre project for the client, a public authority council. Their service had been procured under OJEU rules which placed a cap on their fees. The client offered the Grenfell Tower design to the architect without competitive tender. This was on the condition that the architect's fees when added to their other project's fees would still come under the OJEU cap for the other project. In other words, the two projects' fees would not exceed the cap for the first project. The project leader noted his concern to the Partner as being "concerned about the emphasis of working at risk while planning to OJEU" and he agreed under questioning he had been concerned about the consultant not getting paid and the (low) level of fees to do the job.

The Partner answered this question:

Question: "Now, the process of appointment of (the architect) to the Grenfell Tower project was rather different from (their existing school and leisure centre project for the client). Perhaps I can ask you this way: did the process of appointment of (the architect) to the Grenfell Tower project require you to have any relevant skills, knowledge and experience of overcladding an existing high-rise residential tower block?"

Answer: "No."

The Fire Safety consultant's fee including expenses for the £9 million project was £2,860. The client was also under pressure from the government to reduce costs by capping the amount it could borrow to finance the work.

Standards users should consider very carefully their position in their access to, understanding of and compliance with standards referenced in regulations and/or invoked in specifications and best practice guidance, if they come under cost reduction pressures where health and safety failures would be devastating or catastrophic.

Irrespective of the viability of pricing for work, they are still required to be aware of the full range of applicable standards, know the scope and national conditions of a large number of them, and understand and implement standards invoked in regulations, contract documents and standard operating procedures.

#### 5. Non-existent, ineffectual or lazy communication and assumption.

Approval is permission to proceed. Comment is expressing an opinion or reaction.

The questions to the architectural assistant and answers below relate to the specification of components in the system used to clad Grenfell Tower.

Question: "You can see that (the cladding contractor) used the word "approval". Did you go back to him and say 'Dear (cladding contractor), surely you understand by now that we, (the architect), are not in the business of approving drawings'?"

Answer: "I think, to be fair, this is commonly misused across all projects and has been for a long time, misunderstanding in the distinction between approval and comment".

Question: "He used the expression 'comment/approval'. Can you explain why you didn't correct his misunderstanding, if that's what it was?"

Answer: "For the reason I've given, that I think the word 'approval' is used very loosely within the industry, when that's not actually what it means."

Later on, counsel asked these questions of the architectural assistant's understanding of the CWCT standard.

Question: "Did you, when you came to look at this NBS specification, note that the CWCT standard for systemised building envelopes was stipulated in it? The CWCT clause is fairly standard in H92 (the specification section for the cladding system), I believe."

Answer: "Yes."

Question: "So do we take it from that that, given that you knew that the NBS spec had been used for Grenfell, it would logically follow that you knew that the CWCT standard was set out as part of the specification? Did you, when you came to look at this NBS specification, note that the CWCT standard for systemised building envelopes was stipulated in it? The CWCT clause is fairly standard in H92, I believe."

Answer: "Yes."

Question: "So do we take it from that that, given that you knew that the NBS spec had been used for Grenfell, it would logically follow that you knew that the CWCT standard was set out as part of the specification?"

There followed some discussion and clarification, then

Question: "Did you ever read the standard, the CWCT standard for systemised building envelopes?"

Answer: "Oh, I see, sorry. As a straightforward question, no."

It is not acceptable for a standards user to invoke a standard simply by reference, without either understanding it in detail if it is primary to the product or service, or understanding its scope if it is supporting a primary standard. Standards are written with precision, with the objective of being unambiguous. Assuming the meaning of words and phrases in a particular context (such as UK construction) and relying on others to have the same understanding is dangerous, and undoes one of the foundations of consensus-based national standards.

References and further reading.

Grenfell Tower Inquiry Day 6  
March 2, 2020.

Grenfell Tower Inquiry Day 9  
March 5, 2020.

Grenfell Tower Inquiry Day 14  
March 16, 2020.

All available at:

<https://www.grenfelltowerinquiry.org.uk/evidence>

[Accessed 1 June 2020]. [The Grenfell Tower Inquiry].

### **SES Conference**

This will be a virtual conference on August 5-6, 2020, 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM Eastern.

Registration is free to all and the agenda and registration page can be found here:

<https://www.ses-standards.org/page/SESAnnualConference2020>

### **ISO General Assembly**

A few weeks ago, ISO Council took the regrettable but understandable decision to cancel the ISO General Assembly which had been planned to take place on 23-24 September 2020 in Abu Dhabi.

It was been decided to hold a virtual meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> September, which the IFAN President Ross Wraight will be attending.

### **IEC General Assembly**

The IEC General Assembly was due to be held in Stockholm in October, currently this is scheduled to be held in Geneva, Switzerland 9-13 November.

### **IFAN Meetings**

The next meeting of the IFAN European Group will be a virtual meeting on 28<sup>th</sup> September.

The date for the next meeting of WG16 and other IFAN working groups will also be virtual, dates have yet to be decided.

### **IFAN 47<sup>th</sup> Members Assembly**

Will take place on Thursday 15 October as a virtual meeting, invitations will go out shortly.