

Timber Frame Inferno at Colindale, London

On the 6th July 2006, a major fire occurred in the Beaufort Park Development, Colindale, London. The fire engulfed 2 six storey blocks of timber frame apartments and resulted in the complete burn out of the buildings and damage to adjacent student accommodation. Such was the extent and intensity of the fire that flames and smoke could be seen right across the city of London. During the incident, 300 students were evacuated as was the local police training college. The fire was deemed a major emergency, took five and a half hours to put out and was attended by 20 fire tenders and 100 fire fighters. Fortunately, there was no loss of life due to the fact that the buildings were nearing completion but not yet occupied. The cause of the fire is not yet known, but the builder has announced that the development will be reconstructed using concrete frames.

Local representatives were shocked at the extent of the fire and the speed at which it took hold. They were also incredulous that such high density accommodation could be



built using timber frames. A number of public representatives, involved with the project expressed their reservations from the outset, but this was not sufficient to deter the project going ahead using timber frames. See newspaper article 'Fire Could

Have Been a Major Disaster' (page 11) containing comments made by local representatives and people who witnessed the fire. These comments are particularly relevant in the Irish context, where timber frame construction is now widespread and where there is an attempt by the timber industry to promote multi-storey apartment buildings in timber frame, while at the same time inferring an equivalence between timber frame and concrete built in relation to fire performance.

The Irish Concrete Federation believes that the enclosed photographs and commentaries are clear evidence of the unsuitability of timber frame for multi-storey, multi-occupancy buildings. It is also clear that in the case of two storey dwellings, the introduction of timber frames carries with it an added fire risk of which the consumer has a right to be informed.

In the context of what is now absolutely clear in relation to the performance of timber frame in fire, the Irish Concrete Federation calls for:

- A moratorium on the construction of new timber frame buildings above 3 storeys in Ireland and a re-evaluation of the recommendations of the Timber Frame Consortium Report July 2003.
- An independent study into the fire performance of timber frame dwellings in Ireland, based on actual fires which have taken place.
- A ban on timber cladding on low-rise timber frame buildings.

Timber frame fire – Colindale, London

