

AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2025

HOUSING

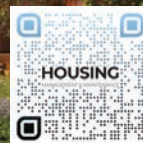
MANAGEMENT & MAINTENANCE

UNLOCKING POTENTIAL IN TOWER HAMLETS

Tower Hamlets Council approves plans to demolish one of its former offices in the capital's most deprived Borough, in a collaborative project to provide 53 affordable homes



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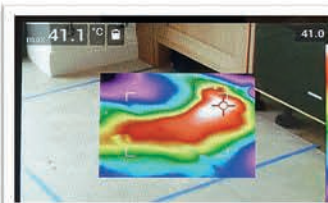
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CONTENTS

AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2025

News & Insights

Industry News.....	04
Comment: Who Pays for Building Safety?	06
Managing the Golden Thread of Information to Ensure Long-Term Safety Round Table Review.....	11
Appointments & News	16



Features

15 Fire Door Safety Week

FIRE DOOR SAFETY WEEK: UNDERSTANDING CHANGE & PREVENTING RISK

Now in its 12th year, Fire Door Safety Week shines a spotlight on safety and awareness. Helen Hewitt of the British Woodworking Federation outlines this year's key themes.

21 Interiors: Coatings & Paints

CREATING SAFER HOMES

Social landlords will need to adhere to a new set of regulations to ensure building occupants remain as safe as possible in their homes. Dulux Trade explains more about the legislation and how landlords can comply.

25 Interiors: Bathrooms

MAKING THE RIGHT SPLASH

With the desire to develop sustainable solutions increasing, managing water usage has become more important than ever. Sophie Weston of Twyford's takes a look at some water-saving solutions.

28 Heating, Ventilation & Air Conditioning: Affordable Warmth

AFFORDABLE WARMTH THAT WORKS

Richard Brown of Electrorad UK explores the advantages of High Heat Retention storage heaters and the benefits they offer both landlords and tenants.

31 Tenant & Resident Engagement: Fire & CO Safety

GUIDE TO FIRE & CO PROTECTION

Jennifer Bickford at Aico highlights the critical importance of proper installation and regular maintenance of life saving alarms, emphasising their role in protecting lives and ensuring long term safety in properties.

34 Structural Elements: Flooring

DEALING WITH DAMP

Stephen Boulton at F. Ball & Co. Ltd. provides crucial advice to guard against the problems caused by excess subfloor moisture when installing floor coverings.

Products

Building Fabric	
Balconies & Walkways	18

Groundworks	
Sewage Treatment	19

Interiors	
Acoustic Wall Panels	20
Floors & Floor Coverings.....	20
Coatings & Paints.....	20
Bathrooms.....	22

Heating, Ventilation & Air Conditioning	
Radiators.....	26
Affordable Warmth	28

Tenant & Residential Engagement	
Fire & CO Safety.....	30

Structural Elements	
Flooring.....	34

Safety & Security	35
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Managing Editor
James Parker

Publisher
Anthony Parker

Account Director
Midge Myatt

Account Manager
Nathan Hunt

Digital Marketing & PR
Account Manager
Suzanne Easter

Operations Director
Shelley Collyer

Events Coordinator
Amy Madigan

Studio Manager
Mikey Pooley

Production Assistant
Georgia Musson

Digital Production
Coordinator
Kim Musson

Feature Coordinator &
Publisher's Assistant
Kim Neville

Finance Director
Simon Reed


An Employee Owned Company

Cointronic House,
Station Road, Heathfield,
East Sussex TN21 8DF

Advertising &
Administration
01435 863500
info@netmagmedia.co.uk

Press Releases
editorial@netmagmedia.co.uk

Registration &
Circulation Enquiries
info@netmagmedia.co.uk

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Editor's Comment



Angela Rayner has finally grasped the nettle (or possibly what could be described as a nettle bush) of Right to Buy, claiming that her team at the Ministry of Housing will deliver a “social rent revolution.”

MHCLG's move to tighten up the Right to Buy criteria could certainly be a hugely impactful move, if it results in the curtailment of the continued sell-off. It is somewhat startling to sit back and take in the fact that over 2 million homes have been sold to council tenants since Thatcher launched the scheme in 1980.

One of the final acts of the Tories' ill-fated Department of Levelling Up was to remove the one saving grace of the Right to Buy scheme, namely the ability of councils to retain 100% of receipts from sales, to reinvest in housing. Fortunately this was reversed by Labour in November 2024, as with approvals for social home building at a record low, this could have been the nail in the coffin. However, Rayner followed this up by slashing discounts for those seeking to buy their council home, in an effort to protect dwindling housing stock, but meaning fewer receipts in the pipeline for HAs. In any case, it's believed that over four in 10 homes sold under Right to Buy are actually owned by private landlords.

The details behind the £39bn investment in the Social and Affordable Homes announced by Chancellor Rachel Reeves in the Spending Review were confirmed this summer by Rayner, putting some flesh on the impressively constructed financial skeleton. Labour's nailed its colours to the mast, promising 300,000 new affordable homes over the next decade. And they are going to make tenants stay in their home for 10 years before they are considered for purchase under Right to Buy.

Rayner's chief adversary is now (former Conservative Party deputy chair) Sir James Cleverly as Shadow Housing Secretary – he replaced the lower-profile, former estate agent Kevin Hollinrake, and Cleverly himself no stranger to property issues. Now drafted in to box for the hot political issue of housing, the Tory Lord was a landlord in Lewisham for several years; an optimist might say this should bestow empathy for tenants, as well as the social landlords who are unable to meet their demand.

James Parker

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On the cover...

Albert Jacob House in Bethnal Green, east London, will be demolished and turned into a new medium-rise development containing 53 homes, and five commercial units on the ground floor for local businesses. See page 05.



Council to demolish former office in Tower Hamlets for 53 new homes

Tower Hamlets Council has approved plans to demolish a former council office building in Bethnal Green East to make way for 53 affordable homes.

Albert Jacob House, on Roman Road, will be demolished and turned into a new development of five to nine stories, containing 53 homes, and five commercial units on the ground floor for local businesses.

The project, approved by the development committee in June, is part of the council's ongoing home building programme and another "major development" in its goal to deliver 4,000 new social homes for rent.

Lutfur Rahman, executive mayor of Tower Hamlets, said: "We are determined to meet the urgent demand for social housing in Tower Hamlets, with far too many families currently living in overcrowded or unsuitable conditions. This is an important project that will provide 53 much-needed social rent homes for our residents."

The development was approved subject to planning obligations and conditions. It has been designed by Child Graddon Lewis, an RIBA award-winning architecture practice based in London with three decades of design experience.

Christopher Gilligan, associate at Child Graddon Lewis, said: "The project has been a real collaborative success, with both the client and project team all striving to deliver essential, affordable, sustainable, and joyful homes. The proposed building as well as its landscaping



successfully weave themselves into the existing urban grain, really transforming the quality of the public realm experienced at street level for the benefit of new and existing neighbouring residents."

He continued: "We are particularly excited

by what feels to be the jewel in the scheme, the combined landscaping, play and amenity between Albert Jacob House and Godley VC House, which creates a public space that is tranquil, safe, and welcoming for all."

Habinteg welcomes two new board members

Habinteg Housing Association has announced the appointment of two new members to its board – Luke McCreery and Richard Blakey.

McCreery and Blakey have joined the social housing landlord's board, adding their decades of experience in operations, property and strategic delivery. McCreery is a specialist in property maintenance and building safety with extensive experience in the social housing sector.

He is currently a director at Curo, a housing association in the south west of England, where he started as an apprentice in 2005. Luke also serves as chair of trustees for homelessness charity Emmaus Bristol.

"With a track record of delivering high quality, cost effective solutions, he brings both operational insight and strategic experience," said the social

landlord. "He is passionate about improving living standards for customers and ensuring long term asset sustainability." Luke joins Habinteg as a member of the organisation's Investment Committee.

Richard Blakey has been chief financial officer at the charity Mencap since 2021 where he also has executive responsibility for a range of support functions such as technology, data, property and strategic delivery. He will take the role of chair of Habinteg's audit, risk and assurance committee from September 2025.

Before joining Mencap, Richard worked in a series of senior finance roles in public and third sector organisations, including Peabody housing association and Essex County Council. Currently, he is the treasurer trustee at the National Brain Appeal, a charity dedicated to raising funds for The National Hospital for Neurology and Neurosurgery in London.

Habinteg's Interim CEO, Martin Warhurst, said: "Luke and Richard bring with them a wealth of knowledge and experience in their respective fields, adding to the extensive expertise we already have on our Board.

"Habinteg champions inclusion by providing accessible homes and neighbourhoods that welcome everyone, including disabled and older people"

"I and the rest of the board look forward to working with them as we continue to find new ways to deliver great customer service, and to build and promote high quality accessible homes."

Habinteg said it "champions inclusion by providing and promoting accessible homes and neighbourhoods that welcome everyone, including disabled and older people, using its accessible housing expertise and influence to push for more homes to be built to accessible design standards."



COMMENT

Who pays for building safety?

Chris Hemmings from the London office of estate agent Carter Jonas gets down to brass tacks on the incoming Building Safety Levy, and its impact on housing providers. He asks whether it runs the risk of further slowing the delivery of much-needed new homes.

The Building Safety Levy (BSL), due to come into effect on 1 October next year, is yet another cost that developers are having to bear in delivering new housing stock across England.

Following the Grenfell Tower tragedy in June 2017, the Building Safety Act 2022 introduced powers to impose a levy on new residential buildings requiring certain Building Control approvals in England, to raise revenue to be spent on building safety. The Act also introduced a Building Safety Regulator to oversee building work and enforce safety standards, particularly for higher risk buildings. As a result of the Act, the Government published new guidelines in March 2024 on the requirement for a second staircase in all new residential buildings over 18 metres, which is mandatory from 30 September 2026 within changes to Approved Document B of the Building Regulations 2010.

The raft of changes has already seen developers amend schemes at planning

stage to incorporate the second staircase and it has been well documented that the volume of applications requiring Building Safety Regulator sign off has created a backlog which has further delayed planning permissions from being granted (Gateway 1) and starts on site (Gateway 2).

The BSL is formulated and administered in a very similar way to Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), being applicable to the gross internal area of major residential schemes with relief for affordable housing. Major schemes are defined as those of 10 or more new residential units and 30 or more new bedspaces in relation to student accommodation. Other uses such as care homes, hotels and other forms of accommodation are exempt from the levy. The levy will be collected on behalf of the Government by local authorities and the income raised will contribute to fixing building defects across England, such as cladding materials on apartment buildings.

Lets get ready for Awaab's Law

David Bly – Managing Director of Cornerstone Management Services Ltd, a company providing independent expert Property Health Surveys recognises the challenges for upholding property health conditions for the long term.

Awaab's Law will be with us in October and, in the absence of also reviewing current processes for dealing with reports of damp, condensation or mould, are we ready to change our thought process alongside recognising cost effectiveness with smarter decision making.

With many surveys to date for these reported issues, our data clearly indicates 91% were dry structures of which, 99% suffered inadequate ventilation that, in the absence of SMART Knowledge, will continue to be a key contributor for repeat outbreaks.

Cornerstone recognise mould is a symptom of a problem and, has a host of root causes and not a single defect therefore, developing a greater understanding of the dwelling, its location and orientation alongside occupancy levels, are key start points for a defined analysis that leads to a compliant solution. In the absence of such, current data and technology utilised today may not uphold Awaab's Law and moreover, could deliver the same problems within a shorter timeframe.



With many expert trades in a supply chain, the importance for a uniform approach is key if we are to learn more of our property types, living standards, everyday atmospheric moisture generation for recognised improvements upheld by defined protocols. Trust is earned through delivering such key services with a known impact of their intended delivery which unfortunately is not the case today.

A 'did you know' approach was mentioned as a key link to aiding the new journey and, as a recognised support mechanism for today's HHSRS assessments. Why? Because it is fair to say HHSRS assesses recognised immediate impacts whereby damp, condensation and mould are timely developments hence a greater understanding of any root causes, effective repairs, any planned retrofits and notable any future Net Zero commitments.



To support a desired rethink and increase the knowledge of all involved from answering complaints through to managing and undertaking repairs, Cornerstone have developed a unique 1-day CPD accredited damp, condensation, mould and ventilation masterclass with a key emphasis on inviting your trades personnel also.

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“One of the key challenges is that partial or staged payments are not allowed”

Chris Hemmings

Rates for the new levy were published in March 2025 by the local authority area, with two rates set according to whether the site is brownfield or greenfield. The rates vary across the country and are set according to weighted average house prices, with brownfield sites receiving a 50% discount compared to greenfield sites. So, for example the brownfield rate in Preston is £7.19 per m², which is in stark contrast to the greenfield rate in Guildford, of £46.15 per m². The cost for a typical private three bedroom house (93 m²) on a greenfield site in Guildford is typically £4,300 per unit, which is roughly 3-4% of the base build cost for that unit – so a small, but not insignificant number when applied to, say, 200 units.

Some brownfield rates in London are even higher. For example in Westminster the rate is £49.01 per m² and in Kensington & Chelsea the rate is £50.17 per m². We understand that the levy will not be subject to indexation, but it will be reviewed every three years and could be adjusted at these intervals.

The timing of the introduction of BLS has been delayed by the Government to 2026, but there is little acknowledgement of the rising cost burden from other legislative changes in recent years, such as Biodiversity Net Gain and other changes to the building regulations (Part L and F), coupled with rampant build cost inflation and higher CIL and Section 106 contributions due to this inflationary indexation.

Building defects can occur on all types of housing sites, be it low rise greenfield developments with a high proportion of houses, or large brownfield developments with apartment towers. In this respect, it seems fair to apply the BSL to all types of housing schemes, with the exception of minor developments, which in part provides some protection for local small scale developers.

However, SME developers would frequently face the cost because the threshold for major developments is just 10 homes. This impacts SME developers disproportionately because they do not benefit from the economies of scale that plc housebuilders can apply to construction costs. I believe the Government could seek a discount on the levy for SME developers to reflect this, or as an alternative it could raise the threshold for paying, for example, to 50 units.

One of the key challenges is that partial or staged payments are not allowed and therefore the full amount for the scheme needs to be paid within the first phase of development, placing additional financial burdens on the project's cashflow.

For those developers constructing apartment schemes above 18 metres, there is the triple challenge of not only the payment of the levy, but the requirement for the second staircase, which reduces the building's efficiency and net sales/lettable area, and the need for sign off by the Building Safety Regulator and the costs and delays this inevitably causes.

Depending on the scheme, the location, the site's landownership history and the transactional terms, it may not be possible to simply deduct the BSL from land acquisition costs.

Moreover, while the BSL on its own is not necessarily a significant drag on the viability of schemes, when added to the ever growing list of planning obligations such as BNG and the requirement for second staircases, it is providing more incentive for developers to challenge planning obligations at application. The introduction of the levy is already being factored into scheme viability, especially at the planning application stage, with developers including it within their financial viability assessments for schemes that are timed to be commenced and not completed by Autumn 2026. This has the impact of reducing the level of affordable housing further still as S106 contributions are usually fixed amounts set by formula, and CIL is non-negotiable.

With the Government's 1.5 million housing target already under significant pressure, there needs to be some assistance to take the hand brake off and accelerate build rates, which could include incentives for both buyers and developers – and one potential incentive could be a delay to the introduction of the BSL.

Chris Hemmings is Partner (Development) at Carter Jonas (London)

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**BUILDING
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Managing the Golden Thread of Information to Ensure Long-Term Safety

The concept of the “golden thread of data” is at the core of the transformed framework for designing and operating new social housing in the wake of Grenfell, and is now a requirement for HRBs under the Building Safety Act. It’s envisaged as a comprehensive, but also transparent set of digital information on every facet of design and construction of a new building, which also provides a fully accountable set of data for future maintenance needs, in an unprecedented way.

The golden thread data has to not only be secure and accurate, but also able to be carefully set up, edited and managed so it’s accessible to different levels of the organisation including for effective ongoing maintenance. One of the key benefits of the golden thread approach is the chance to mitigate against value engineering by contractors to lower-cost options, with a ‘change control’ process that is a fundamental safeguard.

Our recent round table (sponsored by K Systems and Winkhaus) delved into the realities of the new safety framework, and the impact on housing professionals, in depth. It raised a series of challenges, but also produced some insightful ways forward. With building safety now the ultimate priority across the social housing sector, and the golden thread a legal requirement, this was a vital opportunity to share current practice.

ROUND TABLE ATTENDEES

- **Matt Baird**, Co-Chair, Spring Housing Association & Director, Baird & Co Recruitment
- **Alex Lubbock**, Operations Director, Housing Associations’ Charitable Trust
- **Ben Wallbank**, BIM Strategist, Trimble Viewpoint
- **Stephen Hamil**, Innovation Director, NBS
- **Chris Lees**, Chief Executive, Data Clan
- **Paul McSoley**, Vice Chair of Fire, CIBSE
- **Anthony Taylor**, Chair, Building Safety Alliance
- **Hony Premlal**, Chair, Women in Social Housing
- **Hywel Davies**, Head of Technical Insight, Chartered Association of Building Engineers
- **Kevin Mangan**, Technical Director, K Systems

K Systems

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UNRAVELLING THE GOLDEN THREAD

Our expert group looked at how using the golden thread on Higher Risk Building projects heralds a new era of transparency which helps social housing managers

“Recognise that safety, sustainability and maintenance all have much more in common than they are different”

Chris Lees, Data Clan

THE BUILDING SAFETY CHALLENGE

With a raft of challenges on their plate, not least price inflation aligned to increasing cost constraints, managing the golden thread, even if they aren't the Accountable Person, is more work for social landlords. They may be asked to embrace digital checklists, automated alerts for maintenance intervals, and new formal review processes, as well to collaborate with contractors and facilities management teams.

Our expert round table discovered a host of reasons why they should engage with the process, not least to ensure that the data is in the most usable form. We heard a variety of insights from the sector on how this is evolving, but also views on the many remaining obstacles, many of which were organisational. We also heard how making the best of the golden thread means proactive engagement with residents, and a willingness to invest in the process, and expertise required.

THE GOLDEN THREAD IN PRACTICE

The meeting explored the nature of the golden thread, and how project teams need to encompass a wide range of data, including architectural and structural plans, fire safety features, materials used, and ongoing inspection and maintenance records. The information must not only be up-to-date, but also easily accessible – for example to residents as well as contractors and the Building Safety Regulator – and in an interoperable but secure format. Its overall goal is to offer the “single source of truth” advocated by Hackitt for a fully transparent history of the building.

Event chair Matt Baird from Spring Housing asked whether, given the goals of identifying risks and hazards, the golden thread will be a “possible panacea, or a persistent pain” for social housing providers. Data expert Chris Lees said safety needed to be viewed as part of a combination of factors and not be seen as separate from other areas of maintenance like tenant engagement, sustainability and reactive repairs. “I understand that it's a really complicated legislative and regulatory environment, and people naturally try and simplify it.”

He warned that currently, duplication meant inefficiency: “The frustration

is that at least 80-90% of the information that all of those things need is exactly the same information. Social housing providers have a head of building safety in the team, a head of sustainability, then another team for planned maintenance and reactive repairs.” Currently, he asserted, “most social housing providers I've been working with have a veneer on top to try and make it look joined up to the tenant, and a little bit to the Regulator.”

Stephen Hamil of NBS stressed some of the positives of the rigorous new Gateway approval regime for HRBs, in particular the sign-off stage at Gateway 3. “It's confidence in the systems and the products, knowing what has gone in the building, and knowing that product A hasn't been substituted for product B.”

In terms of the ‘pain versus panacea’ question, Hamil said managing the golden thread will be “a little bit of a pain, but it's a necessary pain.” He clarified: “Before the Building Safety Act, and when they looked at what went wrong with Grenfell, things weren't getting verified, things weren't getting checked.”

Hywel Davies, ex-CIBSE and now Chartered Association of Building Engineers was candid on the housing and construction sectors' failings, saying “Awaab Ishak's death was as needless as the 72 deaths at Grenfell, and the fact that the Social Housing Regulator is moving on that with a vengeance is only to be welcomed.” He explained why the rigour and depth of the new data regime is essential, saying “the blunt truth is we know very little about our building stock.”

THE ROLE OF THE ACCOUNTABLE PERSON

Our discussion confirmed that exactly which body should take the key Accountable Person (or Principal Accountable Person) role is not immediately clear; it could be a building owner or landlord, but may be a separate property management company tasked with property maintenance.

However, Hywel Davies said that who should take the role was “clearly defined in the Building Safety Act, you can't subcontract it.” He continued: “You can't say the managing agent is responsible; they're not, you can give them the work, but you take responsibility.”

Davies said there have already been issues around Accountable Persons not sharing information: “There is anecdotal evidence that some APs are simply refusing to provide the information, and perhaps one or two of them need to be challenged, and issued with some sort of enforcement notice by the HSE.”

GOING THROUGH CHANGES

How change is managed within the golden thread in HRB construction and operation phases is fundamental to its success. In the past, this has often been



DEBATING THE REALITIES OF ACCOUNTABILITY

(L-R) Hony Premlal, Anthony Taylor and Alex Lubbock explore why the golden thread needs a change of culture on data sharing

where design intention can be sidetracked by construction efficiencies, without the necessary priority being mandated for overall safety.

The onus is now on social landlords to publish a ‘building safety case,’ put together by the Accountable Person and containing all of the relevant information on the building. How the data on safety risks should be recorded and managed, and how frequently they should be reviewed, are up for debate.

Anthony Taylor said the Accountable Person faced an issue around “how you review them when there is a change of ownership, change of FM provider, change of building manager?” He added: “There’s all sorts of stuff that I don’t think is being taken on board,” but despite this, he had “rarely seen an Accountable Person representative” at meetings.

Taylor also said that simply using software and AI in future to establish maintenance needs would not be the panacea. “Software will do whatever it’s asked to do, but the old adage of rubbish in, rubbish out, is a huge problem; it’s the management and the verification of it.”

SILOS & STANDARDISATION

Some standardisation of the data was needed in order for the golden thread to be practically deliverable, said delegates. But they also agreed there were problems around data sharing, which was working against the efficiency of this approach.

Chris Lees of Data Clan, who was instrumental in developing the golden thread approach itself, said that many issues were being caused by the construction sector remaining in ‘information silos’ – which was leading to much unnecessary duplication. He said that standardisation was called for: “80% of the info we need is the same, but it ends up silo’d, which makes it difficult to share.” Lees said that due to the duplication, there was a perception that achieving the golden thread “is too expensive,” and people were unaware of the savings they will make.

Some delegates such as Paul McSoley of CIBSE drew attention to the issues around a lack of comprehensive product data being provided to design teams: “You can’t keep one little bit of Part B information on a product without the rest, because it means nothing.”

Alex Lubbock said “standardisation of language” was key, and delegates endorsed approaches such as CCPI (Code for Construction Products Information) as well as BIM for standardising information management to bring efficiency in complex projects. The emerging method of digital ‘product passports’ was also discussed, as was the urgent need, advocated by Anthony

“Harmonise the transfer of data so we’re not doing digital duplication”

Kevin Mangan, K Systems

Taylor, to “train FM staff to work with BIM.”

The potential of using ‘digital twins’ i.e. highly detailed digital models of the building, was a “great idea” said Chris Lees, in theory at least, but with the caveat that they “require federation of the data, i.e. the data being in all sorts of different places.” Digital product passports are “good examples,” he said, but “it makes no sense for everybody just to copy the data into their systems every time they use the product.”

There was some disagreement about the worth of QR and RFID codes for products in this new data environment, Lees calling their use “one of the most flawed things I have heard in my life,” where instead we “have to be moving towards machine-interpretable information.” Ben Wallbank of Trimble, and Hamil from NBS pushed back, the former saying “if you’re on site and there’s little in the building, two rooms might look identical.”

BUILDING TRUST

Delegates also warned that it was imperative to engage social housing tenants in ongoing maintenance within the operational phase of golden thread projects, with issues around trust persisting in the sector post-Grenfell. This was exacerbated by problems with collaboration and data sharing in social housing and construction teams. Hony Premlal, who is a consultant and mentor in the social housing sector, said “accountability means changing the culture first.” She asserted: “Systems are not interlinked, and teams are not speaking to each other, including within teams!”

In terms of how best to engage with residents around the ongoing maintenance regimes under the golden thread, Chris Lees said that achieving trust wasn’t simple: “You can’t impose trust on tenants, what you can do is respect them, and if you do that enough, they’ll start to trust you.”

Using personal data was constrained by regulations (principally GDPR), and Lees clarified one issue raised by the chair, i.e. a view in the sector that data needed to be deleted from databases if not currently needed: “This is a really common misconception. You don’t need to delete things just because you don’t have a current and present use for them.” However, he warned there were



CONSENSUS AGAINST THE SILO MENTALITY

Data expert Chris Lees said that the current silo mentality on building data had to change to avoid duplication, and this was a view shared by other delegates

“concerns around recording details about tenants under GDPR and privacy rules – almost all the high value data a social housing provider has is personal.”

Premal concluded: “I’m all for technology, but it can’t replace the human touch,” and mentioned feedback from speaking to housing association Clarion; they are “going back to the Housing Officer model, because that is where the information is and the trust with customers.” This could raise further recruitment challenges, with chair Matt Baird already pointing out the difficulties of funding building safety consultants for smaller HAs.

SPONSOR QUESTION: K SYSTEMS

Kevin Mangan, technical director from co-sponsor K Systems, asked the delegates whether, in the light of a well-reported “supply bottleneck” of projects queuing for Regulator approval, a “two-stage approval approach could be feasible to allow works to start?” Delegates rejected such an idea, however, citing negative consequences for design, and McSoley adding that “what’s being sent to the regulator isn’t everything.”

The Building Safety Alliance’s Anthony Taylor admitted that the Regulator needed “significantly more resources, both in personnel and the money to pay for personnel with adequate competence.” Chris Lees went further, saying it was “functionally inept, but I don’t want to see them using more resources to build a bigger shovel to keep digging the hole.”

On product specification in the realisation of the ‘single source of truth’ goal which underpins the golden thread, Stephen Hamil said that with the advent of the 2024 Construction Products Regulation, “every product needs to have some sort of carrier code, which could be a QR code, it could be an RFID, which goes online and shows the key information in digital form.” He added: “You can’t argue with the principles behind the golden thread, but the devil is going to be in the details.”

And, in terms of engaging residents on fire evacuation protocols, Hony Premal said that landlord awareness was lacking: “How many know which residents are vulnerable? I know we’ve sent lots of letters to customers, but you need to get them to really understand the consequences, have that conversation with people.” She said this was also about getting other partners such as the fire brigade involved, but that “transparency is fundamental – we need to tell customers if something is wrong.”

SPONSOR QUESTION: WINKHAUS

Co-sponsor Winkhaus posed the question, as significant numbers of fire doors have been installed before the new regs, “will the number and location of non-compliant doorsets be made public?” Hywel Davies said the Accountable Person “must provide to each person residing in the building any defects to the fire safety requirements; there’s anecdotal evidence that some councils are simply refusing to provide the information,” and suggested the Regulator should step in.

He added: “I’m not aware we’ve made any significant changes to the technical requirements on fire doors. We have made procedural changes, and made the requirements of fire risk assessments more robust, and that has revealed that a hell of a lot of doors were installed incorrectly.”

Davies cited examples of door fire safety being compromised such as closers being removed by maintenance teams based on resident requests. Anthony Taylor asserted: “Assessment of fire doors should only be done by a competent fire risk assessor, not the inspector, this should remove this mass change of fire doors, which is costing an arm and two legs.”

Chris Lees said some of the inefficiencies e.g. around “using a fire door in a new configuration” could be addressed with standardisation. “We might have to have a custom burn test to figure out whether that certified product will perform to that specification in this wall system, for example.” He continued: “Why do we have to do that so much? If we move to more standardised designs, we wouldn’t need all of that nonsense, and we’d save tons of cost. It’s also safer; there’s less opportunity for misinformation, and less opportunity to forget.”

WHY DOESN’T COLLABORATION HAPPEN?

Alex Lubbock nailed a key remaining issue in construction of “why doesn’t collaboration happen,” and pinpointed variances in application of the new laws across public and private sectors working against this collective approach. But where there is clear legal responsibility in particular, Anthony Taylor concluded that the overarching change for construction in social housing was that “it has to wake up to the idea that you’re accountable for your designs. We want to know what you’re doing, and why you’re doing it.”

For a longer version of the report on this Building Insights round table, please visit www.insights.netmagmedia.co.uk

Fire Door Safety Week: Understanding change & preventing risk

Now in its 12th year, Fire Door Safety Week shines a spotlight on safety and awareness. Helen Hewitt of the British Woodworking Federation outlines this year's key themes, and battery fires in particular.

This September, Fire Door Safety Week returns for its 12th year, continuing its mission to raise awareness of the critical role that fire doors play in protecting life, property, and peace of mind. The campaign has become a cornerstone of passive fire protection advocacy over the last decade. Yet today, new and intensifying fire risks, particularly the rise in lithium ion battery incidents, underscore why fire door safety cannot afford to slip down the agenda.

Fire doors remain one of the most effective and reliable means of preventing the spread of fire and smoke, providing occupants with time to leave the building while protecting escape routes to help emergency services access the building safely. Their performance relies on proper specification, installation and maintenance. Sadly, issues such as damage, misuse or poor repair standards remain widespread.

Evolving fire risks and upcoming changes to fire door testing standards are reshaping the fire safety landscape; meaning Fire Door Safety Week remains crucial for raising awareness. The UK Government has confirmed that from 2029, fire resistance testing for fire doors will move from the current British Standard (BS 476-22) to the European classification system (EN 13501-2), aligning with recommendations from the Hackitt Report and wider regulatory reforms following the Grenfell Tower tragedy.

Understandably, this transition raises important questions across housing stock managers and fire safety officers. What does this change mean for existing stock? Are doors tested to the current British Standard still compliant? The short answer is yes. Fire doors tested to BS 476 remain fully valid and effective throughout this transition period and beyond, provided they are maintained appropriately and demonstrate the required certification.

In fact, Government testing confirmed that timber fire doors performed consistently well under BS 476, with resistance times exceeding the 30 minute benchmark. For BWF members, test averages surpassed 46 minutes, providing strong evidence of the robustness and reliability of compliant timber doors.

The key for housing associations and councils is to be aware and prepare for the upcoming transition, while being confident that maintained and fit for purpose, certified fire doors tested to the current British Standard remain compliant. There is no requirement to replace doors that meet performance standards. However, engaging early with your supply chain and understanding the future standard now will help shape procurement strategies ready for 2029.

We continue to work with industry partners, regulators and testing bodies to ensure our members and the wider sector are prepared. Through continued guidance and content, we aim to demystify this regulatory shift while maintaining confidence in timber fire doors and the protection they provide.

Fire Door Safety Week this year will explore the modern fire risks around the home, following a sharp rise in lithium ion battery fires in UK properties. With millions of everyday devices powered by rechargeable batteries, from electric scooters and electric bikes to power banks, vapes, laptops, and cordless tools, the risk is no longer isolated to industrial sites or transport hubs. It's in our homes.

In 2024, Scotland's Fire and Rescue Service reported a staggering 766%



increase in battery related fires since 2018. Average insurance claims involving lithium ion fires now exceed £50,000, and many originate from common residential behaviours: overcharging, using damaged batteries or relying on unregulated, counterfeit chargers.

For housing providers managing multi occupancy blocks or vulnerable residents, this emerging fire risk demands attention. The potential for rapid, intense combustion from battery failures, often occurring in hallways or near exits, poses significant threats to escape routes, smoke control systems and resident safety. This year's campaign will explore where these risks exist in homes, how residents and responsible persons can help mitigate them, and the role fire doors play in delaying the spread of fire and smoke from lithium ion ignition points.

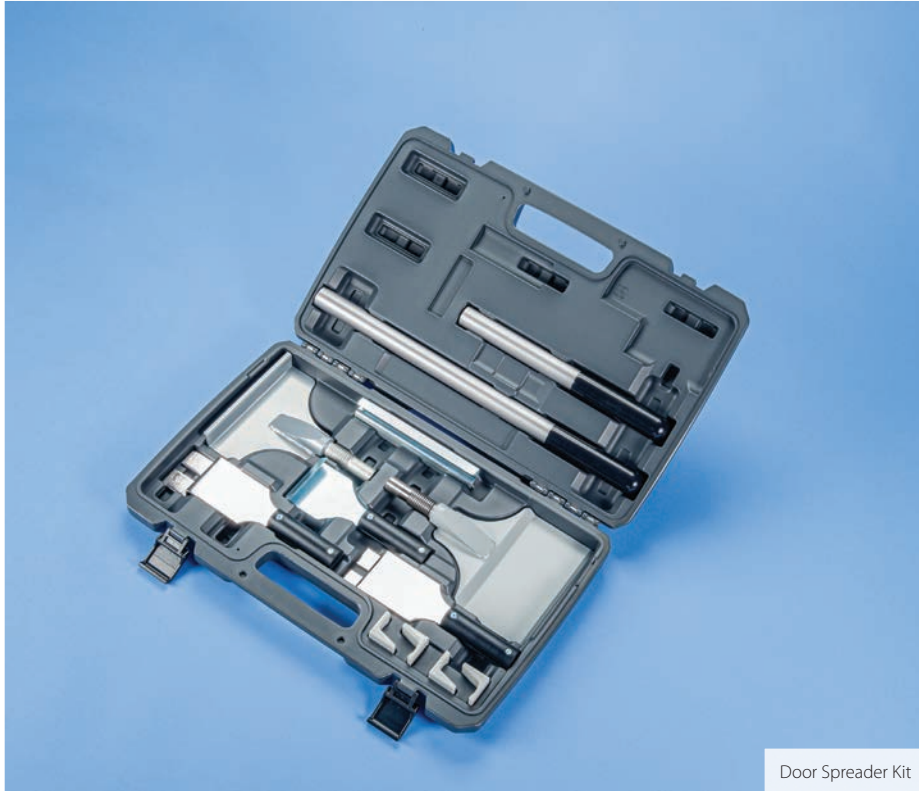
We'll be releasing new research to understand public knowledge, device ownership, and safe storage practices across the UK. Our aim is to provide housing managers, fire safety officers and maintenance teams with the insight they need to inform both residents and retrofit strategies.

Whether tackling misinformation around fire door standards or raising awareness of new threats like lithium ion battery fires, our message this year is clear – fire safety is everyone's responsibility.

As ever, fire doors can only do their job if they are fit for purpose and properly maintained. This year, as we embrace change and confront new challenges, we do so with a continued commitment to knowledge, responsibility, and prevention.

Helen Hewitt is CEO of the British Woodworking Federation

UPVC and composite door solutions



Door Spreader Kit



Advanced Window Kit



De-Glazing Tool

For housing associations, ensuring properties are safe, functional and cost-effective is paramount. Souber Tools, the UK's leading and longest-established manufacturer of locksmith tools, has been a trusted name among professionals since its founding in 1990 by Paul Souber. With 35 years of expertise, the company has built a reputation for delivering simple, reliable tools, distributed across the UK and exported to 25 countries. Now, Souber Tools is revolutionizing property maintenance for housing associations by addressing the persistent challenges of UPVC and composite door repairs.

In 2022, Souber Tools expanded its portfolio to focus on UPVC door and window repair solutions, responding to a critical need in residential property

management. Paul Souber partnered with Paul Batty, a UPVC repair specialist from Hull, to develop a range of over a dozen specialised tools and kits tailored for UPVC doors, windows and composite doors. These innovative solutions are designed to minimize repair costs, reduce tenant disruption and extend the lifespan of property assets, offering housing associations a practical approach to maintenance challenges.

In 2024, Souber Tools introduced kits specifically engineered for failed UPVC multipoint door locks and window mechanisms. With over 5,000 kits sold, these affordable tools have proven their value by enabling repairs with minimal damage and preserving property value. Looking ahead to 2025, the company is set to launch nine new tool kits,

each addressing unique industry challenges such as poor maintenance, temperature fluctuations, UK humidity and hinge wear – common issues that, if ignored, can lead to costly replacements.

The collaboration between Paul Souber, a former Chubb technical lock expert and Paul Batty, a UPVC repair specialist, has driven this progress. Their combined expertise has resulted in practical, high-quality tools that empower housing associations to address maintenance proactively, ensuring safer homes for tenants. In the first two years of their partnership, the duo developed five innovative products, laying the foundation for further advancements.

Housing associations can explore these ground-breaking solutions at the Master Locksmiths Association Lock Expo, taking place from 17-19 October 2025 at the Telford International Centre. Souber Tools will showcase its full range of products at a 40 m² stand, offering live, hands-on demonstrations. With 100 exhibitors and 2,500 trade visitors expected, the event is a prime opportunity to discover how Souber Tools is transforming the repair and maintenance industry.

For more information or to connect with Souber Tools, visit the website or send the company an email. Don't miss the chance to see these innovative solutions in action at the Telford International Centre this October.

info@soubertools.com www.soubertools.com



Paul Souber



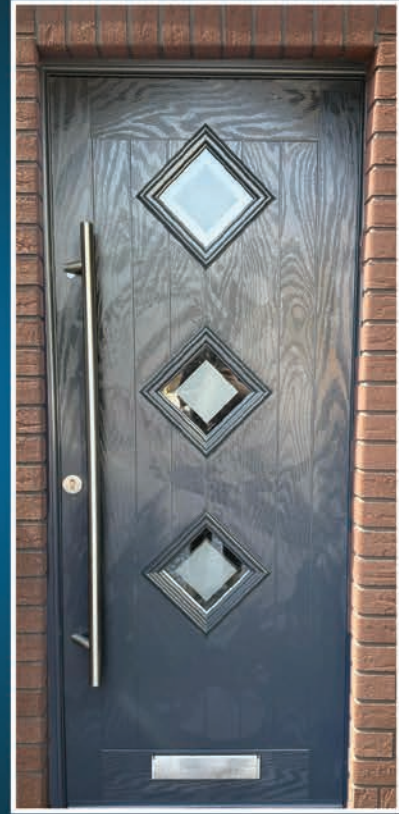
Paul Batty



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Souber Tools offers solutions to many different UPVC Door, Window and Composite Door breakdowns. Come and visit us and experience the solutions with 9 new kits being launched at the Master Locksmiths Association Lock Expo 17th-19th October 2025.



Adra adopts Aico's Connected Home Solution

Aico, a leader in home life safety, has announced that Adra has chosen to implement their Connected Home Solution to support the monitoring and management of properties participating in the Optimised Retrofit Programme (ORP) this year. Aico's Connected Home Solution provides real-time data on indoor environmental conditions, monitoring temperature, humidity, and carbon dioxide levels to support healthier living environments and reduce risks related to damp, mould, and condensation. The system now taps into the Smart DCC network to monitor energy usage with no additional hardware required.

01691 664100 www.aico.co.uk/homelink



Vent-Axia welcomes Awaab's Law guidance

Vent-Axia has welcomed the Government's recent publication of 'Awaab's Law: Draft guidance for social landlords', following Awaab's Law being laid out in front of Parliament on 25 June 2025. The draft guidance marks a critical step in helping social housing landlords prepare for their legal obligations. Ashley Smith, product manager at Vent-Axia said: "Effective ventilation is vital to improve indoor air quality and plays a crucial role in tackling condensation and mould. At Vent-Axia we work closely with landlords to help them choose the right ventilation for their individual property so they meet their duty of care."

0344 856 0590 www.vent-axia.com/social-housing



Ashley Smith, product manager at Vent-Axia

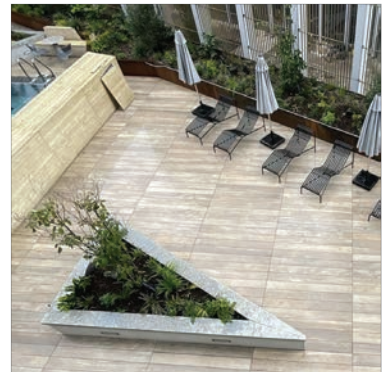
Dura Composites advises specifiers on meeting high-rise fire regulations

Many specifiers are unaware that the testing and implementation of decking and cladding for buildings over 11 metres can affect their compliance with the Building Safety Act fire regulations. Dura Composites advises on how they can ensure they're meeting current guidelines. Specifiers can protect themselves by asking the following questions:

- Is the certificate provider UKAS accredited?
- Has every component of the product received a fire rating? Different aspects of a product may perform differently.
- Do the fire rating and test certificate match the field of application?
- Does the installation guide advise on installation methods to match the field of application?
- Has the right orientation been tested? Different orientations may impact the fire rating of the product.
- Have all of the available colours been tested? This may impact its fire rating.
- Does the fire certificate state which colours are covered, as outlined in section-4 of the field of application?

For more guidance speak to Dura Composites' high-rise decking and cladding team.

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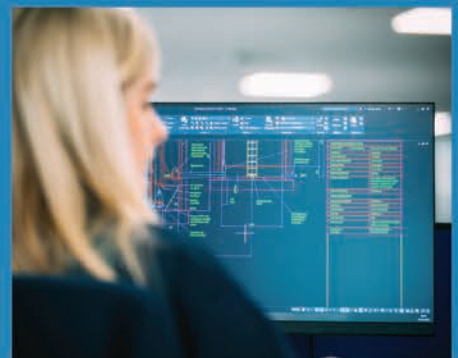




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TOTAL WATER EXPERTISE

HMG's decorative coatings detailed in a new comprehensive guide

HMG Paints have launched their Decorative Coatings Guide, underlining their wealth of expertise in this marketplace to assist the painter in achieving the highest quality results across the whole spectrum of domestic or commercial, contemporary or heritage buildings.

The guide covers both a water-based Vinyl Matt, as well as a Vinyl Silk Emulsion which contains a higher sheen. Both paints are quick drying with excellent colour retention. Acrylic eggshell, also water-based, provides a durable, wipeable finish and Contract Matt Emulsion offers good covering power for new work applications.

The Decorative Coatings Guide also features trim paints in the form of both water-based Gloss and Satin Finishes, plus Acrylic Primer Undercoat, suited to a wide range of substrates.

The HydroPro range of coatings is also detailed. These include a superior, micro-porous multi-surface paint for internal or external use and HydroPro Garden Paint designed to protect fencing sheds and other outdoor features. Also in the range is HydroPro Masonry Paint that gives a tough, hard wearing easy to maintain result.

The latest addition to HMG Paints' growing HydroPro range of products, Floor Paint, is formulated for either interior or exterior use and can be applied to suitably prepared bare

and previously painted floor areas including bedrooms, kitchens, domestic garage, workshop, office, and studio.

It is an innovative, high-performance, single-pack, cross-linking water-based coating, low odour, quick drying with a tough, hard-wearing mid sheen finish available in a choice of 10 colours.

HydroPro Floor Paint is one of three distinct floor coatings recently launched by HMG. The others are Polyurethane Floor Paint and 2K Epoxy HD Floor Paint, details of which are contained in a separate Floor Paint Guide.

The Decorative Coatings brochure contains a handy at-a-glance guide that shows which products are suited for walls, wood and metal; all are suitable for interior use and most for external.

HMG Paints recognise the importance of colour and have used their wealth of experience to create an 'Essentials Colour Collection' a collection of versatile shades. Perfect for any situation. These have been hand-picked by the company's advanced colour stylists and incorporate both a number of classic shades along with newly developed colours at the forefront of modern trends.

Decorators interested in trying out any of HMG Paint's floor paint products for themselves can visit HMG's online e-commerce store at



shop.hmgpaint.com for an online discount.

By using the exclusive code PNDPRO25, decorators can get themselves 25% off all floor paint, online only.

The HMG Decorative Coatings Guide is available both online and direct and can also be found at many of HMG's local distributors. You can obtain a copy of HMG's Decorative Coatings Guide via the website below.

Manchester-based HMG are the UK's leading independent paint company, whose expertise dates back to the company's founding in 1930. All of HMG's products are made in Britain.

0161 205 7631

shop.hmgpaint.com/products/decorative-coatings-guide

Zest unveils new range of acoustic wall panels

Zest Wall Panels, part of Swish Building Products, has announced an extension to its range with the launch of its new contemporary Acoustic Wall Panels. Manufactured with real wood veneers and rigid, fully recycled plastic backing, these stylish slatted wall panels are specifically designed to absorb noise and improve sound quality. With the real wood veneer covering all three sides of each slat, these panels are beautiful from every angle. They are available in four timeless shades, Washed Oak, Oiled Oak, Ash Grey, and Contemporary Oak, allowing them to blend seamlessly into any style of interior design. Available as single panels and standing 2.6 m high, Zest Acoustic Wall Panels are easy to install and ideally suited to both modern and older properties and any size and shape of space. "An increase in customer demand for a quality product, together with a desire to extend our range led us to create our new Zest Acoustic Wall panels," explains Brian Neville, national account manager, at Zest. "Our aim is to offer a high specification wall panel which beautifully combines style, substance, and sustainability. With their stylish looks, industry leading acoustic qualities, and enviable sustainability credentials, we believe we have achieved this with our acoustic wall panels." Further information about the new premium Acoustic Wall Panels can be found by contacting Zest Wall Panels.

01827 317 200 zestwallpanels.co.uk/wall-panels/acoustic-wall-panels



Cost-effective floors that support tenants

With 80% of social homes still rented without flooring and growing scrutiny in standards of accommodation for tenants, social housing providers are having to place increasing focus on the provision of suitable floorcoverings within all areas. With **Beauflor's** cost-effective sheet vinyl floors it is possible to deliver tenants a home-like, supportive floor that adds comfort. When managing tight budgets and high expectations, selecting the right flooring is critical. Beauflor's flooring delivers a uniquely cost-effective solution, balancing low total cost with performance, compliance and satisfaction. Along with a low purchase price reducing the cost of installation significantly improves the provider's total expenditure on flooring within social housing. The textile backing of Beauflor Quintex ensures fast glue-free installation on top of existing floors and poor condition subfloors. The floor allows quick fitting in new properties as well as refurbish at voids. Quintex's added slip-resistance (R10) ensures a safer surface in bathrooms and kitchens, while the Premium Coating aids maintenance in every room, helping tenants to look after their floor. Polaris is another Beauflor sheet vinyl floor that's faster to install thanks to its back emboss. Again, with R10 slip-resistance it brings safety underfoot in bathrooms and kitchens, while its Premium Coating ensures a surface that's simple to care for. Both Quintex and Polaris come in a range of attractive natural designs.

info@beauflor.com www.beauflor.com



Safer homes, by law

With the dawning of Awaab's Law, social landlords will need to adhere to a new set of regulations to ensure building occupants remain as safe as possible in their homes. Dulux Trade explains more about the legislation and how landlords can comply.

Hazards in Social Housing (Prescribed Requirements) (England) Regulations 2025, also known as Awaab's Law, comes into effect from October 2025. It applies to the types of hazards prescribed by the housing health and safety rating system (HHSRS), including damp and mould.

To comply with the new regulations, social landlords must investigate potential emergency hazards within 24 hours of becoming aware of them and potential significant hazards within 10 working days. They must then provide the tenant with a written summary of the investigation findings within three working days. If a significant hazard is identified, relevant safety work must be undertaken within five working days of the investigation concluding.

With the impending Awaab's Law about to give legal weight to the existing pressures to eradicate damp and mould – common issues within housing – it is worth looking at their impact, and some key measures. It is especially prevalent in older housing stock that might not have been built with damp-proof courses or damp-proof membranes that work to prevent moisture from entering buildings. If left untreated, damp can cause damage to furnishings, surfaces and even the structure of a building, which can become hazardous for occupants. It also creates the conditions for mould to grow.

Mould is a form of fungus that releases toxic spores and vapours into the air. It can cause serious health issues for building occupants and is particularly dangerous for people who are more vulnerable, like children and those with weakened immune systems. Under Awaab's Law, social landlords must quickly respond to concerns of damp and mould to ensure the property is safe for habitation. To do this, there are four key steps to follow, outlined below.

TREAT THE UNDERLYING CAUSE

To protect occupants and create a safe living environment, social landlords must work with contractors to identify the underlying cause of the damp and mould. If this is not remedied before the mould is treated, it will continue to grow back and be a risk to residents.

REMOVE & TREAT THE MOULD

Once the underlying cause of the mould has been addressed, it can then be removed and the surface treated to prevent the mould from regrowing. To do this, it is recommended to use fungicidal washes and mould removers that contain powerful fungicides which remove mould. Appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) should be worn to prevent contact and the inhalation of harmful spores.

PREPARE THE SURFACE FOR PAINTING

Before painting can begin, contractors must prepare the surface using a stain-blocking primer. This will help to ensure a quality final finish by preventing mould and damp stains from bleeding through the new paint.

To keep disruption to residents to a minimum, use a multi-functional product that offers a primer, sealer, stain block and undercoat in one advanced formula. With only one, quick-drying product needed, contractors can make time efficiencies.

This solution can also be used across all major interior and exterior surfaces, so it can be confidently recommended across projects to speed up the decision-making process.

APPLY THE TOPCOAT

Following these steps, the topcoat can be applied. When choosing a paint, it



Under Awaab's Law, social landlords must quickly respond to concerns of damp and mould to ensure the property is safe for habitation

is important to look for solutions that will prevent mould from regrowing.

Fungicidal ranges contain a special fungicide in the paint film that inhibits the growth of fungi and mould inside buildings. This helps to prevent mould from reappearing on the paint film. The products' broad spectrum of antifungal activity makes them ideal for most interior walls and ceilings that are likely to be disfigured by mould.

In conclusion, social landlords should work closely with contractors to ensure the right measures are taken to identify and address mould and damp issues. As well as removing the mould, it is important to minimise the chance of it returning with specialist paints and coatings that are designed to inhibit fungi and mould growth to improve occupant safety.

Article supplied by Dulux Trade

Marmox holding the line on NHBC wetroom requirements



Not only does 2025 mark the 25th anniversary of Harry Parsons setting up Marmox UK Ltd, but it will also remind many longer-serving bathroom and wetroom specialists of when the manufacturer's remarkable Multiboard product first became available to the home market – providing them with a totally waterproof, insulating tilebacker board that completely eclipsed the performance of conventional plasterboard.

The fact that it took almost a quarter-century for the NHBC to tighten its regulations on the unsuitability of certain substrates in these settings will also be a matter of frustration for the countless homebuyers who have suffered the inconvenience and expense of needing to have the walls – and often the floor structure – around baths and showers reinstated due to water penetration and consequential damage. In addition to gypsum plasterboard, the guidance also effectively discourages specifiers from utilising magnesium oxide boards, which have shown a tendency to suffer moisture-related failures.

For those who have yet to hear about the country's leading warranty provider's introduction of tough new guidelines to prevent such water damage, we should outline the main content of NHBC 9.2/06, which came into force on 1 January this year. The document applies to all new homes registered with the NHBC, focusing on waterproofing details in bathrooms and other wetrooms. It stresses the need for structural

integrity in waterproofing solutions, with particular attention paid to areas around baths and shower enclosures. In wetrooms where the entire floor and surrounding walls are expected to be regularly wetted – and where power showers are installed – full tanking is required. In less arduous situations, such as with low-flow showers, waterproof adhesive and grout may be considered adequate, though specifiers should be mindful that fittings and flow rates may be increased by future occupants.

From the perspective of manufacturers such as Marmox – whose waterproof panels, shower formers, tapes and adhesives are now under renewed scrutiny – the onus is on them to prove that all system components perform together so water cannot penetrate beyond the line of defence. Supportive of the NHBC initiative, Marmox has now had further BBA testing, which confirms the modified concrete cement-coated XPS boards not only offer a stable background for direct tiling, but also fulfil the enhanced technical objectives of 9.2/06.

In relation to the NHBC Standards 2025, the certificate states: "In the opinion of the BBA, Marmox Tilebacker Boards (referring to Multiboards), if installed, used and maintained in accordance with this certificate, can satisfy or contribute to satisfying the relevant requirements in relation to NHBC Standards Part 9 Finishes; Chapters 9.2 Wall and Ceiling Finishes and 9.3 Floor Finishes."

The technical manager for Marmox, Mark Bowman, comments: "Essentially, the new guidance means you have to prove your system is waterproof – not just the boards themselves – which, as Multiboard is a modified cement-faced extruded polystyrene, is a given. So, you have to offer a viable solution for the joints between them, which we do with Marmox Self-Adhesive Waterproofing Tape and MSP 360 Sealant & Adhesive. The actual test conducted by the BBA saw a box – somewhat reminiscent of a Belfast sink – being built, and the prescribed volume of water poured into it to ensure it didn't leak. That testing was completed on the 27 February this year.

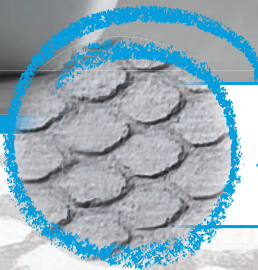
"The BBA is the only test house authorised to carry out this testing in relation to the new NHBC guidance, and the fact that the joints were treated in the same way as any sheet of Multiboard installed when tanking a wetroom should give real confidence to specifiers, installers, and end users."

Marmox is currently in the process of updating its selection of shower formers – rationalising the range of sizes, attaching a slightly different model of drain outlet, and featuring a section of membrane bonded onto the back to overlap with the rest of the boarding. The Marmox stand at this year's Installer Live exhibition also saw the company showcasing new versions of its popular shower niches and other products that help contribute to a consistently constructed wetroom shell.

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IVC Commercial publishes its outlook on vinyl flooring for social housing projects

Today, without legal or regulatory requirements for flooring (England and Scotland only) many social homes continue to suffer from bare concrete or floorboards. Only guidance in England stating that flooring in kitchens and bathrooms should be capable of 'being readily cleansed and maintained in a hygienic condition', stops many social landlords and providers leaving tenants without floorcoverings at all. Yet, the situation may be changing. Published in April 2024, the Welsh Housing Quality Standard 2023 requires that all habitable rooms, staircases and landings should have suitable floor coverings at change of tenancy. The Housing Ombudsman Service's report published in May, *Repairing Trust*, has also revealed that since 2020 there has been a 474% increase in complaints concerning substandard living conditions in social housing. In response, this document – *Vinyl Floors for Social Housing Projects* – provides flooring contractors, housing associations and social housing landlords with an immediate reference on how to respond to changes in industry regulations, and how to overcome the challenge of the inadequate provision of flooring. It deep-dives into the flooring solutions that can be used to provide tenants with a comfortable home that supports wellbeing, while also delivering on the essential need for value and durability. In print and digital formats, *Vinyl Floors for Social Housing Projects* is available by contacting IVC Commercial.

ivc.service.uk@unilin.com www.ivc-commercial.com




Cistermiser welcomes bold water industry reforms and focus on sustainable future

Cistermiser has welcomed the findings of the Independent Water Commission and the Government's commitment to fundamental reform of the water sector, including the replacement of Ofwat with a new integrated regulator. "We support this report and its focus on the pressing challenges facing the water industry – from leakage and pollution to long-term supply resilience," says Richard Braid, managing director at Cistermiser. "It rightly recognises the need for coordinated action from regulators, water companies, suppliers, manufacturers and consumers, while building on the ambition of the 2038 and 2050 sustainability targets." The report highlights the importance of smarter data use and more widespread metering – areas where Cistermiser's water management technologies play a vital role. "Solutions that identify inefficiencies, detect leaks early and support responsible water use will be central to the sector's future," continues Richard. "Our intelligent washroom controls and flow monitoring systems are already helping non-domestic buildings – from hospitals to universities – minimise water waste and support sustainability goals." While the report focuses primarily on household supply and consumer protections, Cistermiser stresses that non-domestic buildings must not be overlooked. "The principles of water efficiency, smarter infrastructure and long-term planning apply just as strongly in commercial and public buildings. We're committed to supporting the sector as it enters a new era of collaboration and accountability," concludes Richard.


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Making the right splash

With the desire to develop sustainable solutions increasing, managing water usage is more important than ever. Sophie Weston of Twyford takes a look at recent water-saving innovations.

Water scarcity is a growing global concern, and buildings play a crucial role in water consumption. Of course, manufacturers are responding, and significant innovation has been evident in water efficiency measures. Key industry stakeholders, from specifiers to installers, now have access to a wide range of products and technologies, from water saving toilets to taps with built-in technology.

The key is in incorporating technologies that do not require major change from users, because evidence shows that there will be little change if left to user habits.

However, it's important to reassure tenants that even small changes in the bathroom can have a significant impact on water consumption. For instance, brassware like the infra-red spout has built-in water-saving technology, allowing the customer to have better control of their water consumption. Infrared taps are proximity-activated, eliminating the risk of accidentally leaving the water flowing. Taps fitted with this technology will usually halt the water even for the briefest of absences, such as when reaching for the soap.

The toilet flush is one area that has been a real focus of development, and it is easy to see why when you consider that more than 11 billion litres of potable water are used in buildings in the UK every day, and over a third of that is used to flush toilets. On average, a full flush toilet uses 13 litres of water per flush compared to a dual flush toilet, which uses four to six litres, making dual flush technology one of the most effective ways to reduce water consumption.

Manufacturers are increasingly producing dual flush plates and cistern systems that feature water saving as standard. This uses four or 2.6 litres for each flush; that's 60% less water than a standard toilet.

Water saving cisterns are only the first step; maintenance and upkeep are essential factors

However, water saving cisterns are only the first step. Maintenance and upkeep are essential. The integrity of washers in valves and flat rubber seals can degrade over years of usage, so remind your tenants to check their WCs for running water in the bowl when the toilet has not been flushed.

To help tenants reduce water usage in the shower without compromising on performance, showers fitted with a regulator or aerator are recommended. An aerator combines air with water to give the feeling of power while regulators place an upper limit on flow rates.

Despite a shower using less water than a bath, most customers still like the choice. Manufacturers are continuing to develop space saving tubs with a lower water capacity, providing the perfect option for residents who want to save water while still enjoying the occasional soak.

PUBLIC SECTOR

The pressure on public sector projects shows no sign of letting up, with ageing buildings, dwindling budgets and increased regulatory demands all coming together to create unique challenges for landlords and operators.



Water efficiency is another key driver in improving the sustainability of our buildings and should not be ignored

Remember, the Government has committed to cut emissions from public sector buildings by 50% by 2032, and 75% by 2037 against 2017 levels, on the path to 2050. The Future Buildings Standard, set to come into force in 2025, will also set minimum efficiency standards for new non-domestic buildings, following changes to Part L (conservation of fuel and power) and Part F (ventilation) of the Building Regulations.

Green measures to help meet these targets inevitably focus largely on energy intensive services like heating, but water efficiency is another key driver in improving the sustainability of our buildings and should not be ignored.

Additionally, the Building Regulations Approved Document Part G states that “reasonable provision must be made by the installation of fittings and fixed appliances that use water efficiently for the prevention of undue consumption of water.” New domestic properties should be designed and built so that they use no more mains water than an average of 125 litres per person per day.

THE FUTURE BATHROOM

As demands for eco-friendly designs continue to grow, and as regulations around building efficiency become more stringent, green innovations that combine luxury and comfort with substantial environmental benefits will become an attractive option for landlords and residents looking to create spaces that are both appealing and sustainable.

With all of this in mind, and as perceptions continue to evolve, multifunctional, technology driven solutions for water efficiency should form a key part of any sustainability design and planning in new and existing homes.

Sophie Weston is head of marketing at Twyford

Multi-surface paint ideal for rental properties

Anyone renting out property needs to be able to rely on quick, easy and reliable maintenance fixes, especially during tenant changeovers. V33 Renovation Multi-Surface paint is a major innovation in emulsions, ensuring a great finish. It is easy and quick to apply and offers optimal performance. Available in nine shades plus white, this ground-breaking satin finish paint is resistant to water, stains and knocks, and is ultra-washable, affording a professional-looking finish that tenants will appreciate. Requiring no undercoat, V33 Renovation Multi-Surface paint achieves a beautiful result on surfaces.



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Quicker delivery for Stelrad radiators

Stelrad has introduced a new quicker turnaround service for the supply of some of its radiators in colour. Initially this new rapid turnaround service will apply to the popular Column and Concord ranges, and to the Classic Towel Rail, Caliente and Concord towel rail products when ordered in one of the now 55 standard RAL colours and finishes within the huge range of radiators available – that's a significant increase over the previous 32 or 35 colour options. The lead time has been reduced from the current eight weeks to up to fourteen days. Further improvements and additions will be announced in due course.



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Affordable warmth that works

Richard Brown of Electrorad UK explores the advantages of high heat retention storage heaters, and the compelling benefits they offer both landlords and tenants.



As UK winters become longer and energy prices continue to rise, providing reliable, cost-effective warmth is more important than ever, especially for landlords, housing providers, and property managers. More than ever, residents expect homes that are both comfortable and affordable to run. Heating systems that fall short of this standard can lead to constant recalls to properties, complaints or tenants choosing to leave, resulting in empty properties!

Upgrading from old storage heaters that offer no control and never enough heat to last the day, to modern electric heating, such as High Heat Retention (HHR) storage heaters, offers a practical, future-ready solution. Used on Economy 7 tariffs, they store heat during off-peak hours when electricity is cheaper and release it gradually throughout the day, keeping spaces consistently warm whilst significantly reducing energy costs.

There are HHR storage heaters that use advanced insulation, precision

thermostats and adaptive controls to deliver efficient, low-maintenance heating, ensuring comfort when needed and energy savings when not.

TENANT SATISFACTION

Heating costs are an ongoing concern, and high winter bills are a common cause of frustration. Offering affordable and efficient heating in your properties can significantly improve satisfaction and, with it, retention rates.

Tenants who feel warm and in control of their energy use are more likely to renew tenancy agreements, report fewer issues and take greater care of the property, which means: lower turnover and reduced voids, fewer complaints, fewer engineer call outs to inefficient heating systems and stronger relationships with your tenants and improved reputation.

In competitive markets, energy-efficient heating can also make properties more attractive to prospective tenants.

Heating systems that fall short of this standard can lead to constant recalls to properties, complaints or tenants choosing to leave, resulting in empty properties

EPC COMPLIANCE

Energy performance is a growing priority, especially with the UK Government tightening regulations around Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (MEES). Properties that fail to meet the EPC ratings risk being unrentable.

HHR storage heaters can contribute positively to EPC assessments by improving the heating system's overall efficiency, reducing energy wastage and lowering running costs. When used alongside proper insulation and economy tariffs such as E7 they can help raise SAP ratings and ensure you remain compliant with current and future legislation.

UPGRADE

Compared to gas systems, HHR electric heaters are simple to install and require minimal maintenance. There's no need for annual servicing, and the risk of breakdowns is low. For property managers and landlords overseeing multiple units, this offers a hassle-free, long-term solution.

Combined with other affordable measures like draught-proofing, thermal curtains and loft insulation, HHR systems deliver even greater cost efficiency and comfort without large capital outlay and installation mess.

Investing in high heat retention storage heaters is a strategic move that delivers value across the board. From reduced energy bills and improved tenant retention to higher EPC scores and lower maintenance costs, the benefits are clear both in the short term and long term!

Richard Brown is managing director of Electrorad UK



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we had. They also linked all of our alarms before they...

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A guide to fire & CO protection

Jennifer Bickford from Aico highlights the critical importance of proper installation and regular maintenance of life saving alarms, emphasising their role in protecting lives and ensuring long term safety in social housing properties.

Designing a home plays a pivotal role in ensuring occupant safety and wellbeing. A critical aspect of this responsibility is the correct integration of fire and carbon monoxide (CO) alarms. Getting this right ensures alarms provide life saving detection and respond quickly in a fire or CO event.

It's essential to note that specific requirements and best practices can vary significantly depending on the property type and local building regulations. Always consult the latest versions of relevant standards and legislation.

SITING ALARMS

The placement of fire and CO alarms is paramount to their effectiveness. While seemingly straightforward, there are considerations to take when maximising detection and alerting occupants promptly.

For optimal fire detection, heat and smoke alarms should be located as centrally as possible on the ceiling, and at least 300 mm away from walls, light fittings, or other obstructions. This distance is vital to avoid restricted airflow, which can delay smoke reaching the sensor.

Strategic placement ensures audibility throughout the property. Installing alarms within three meters of every bedroom door will allow residents to be woken from sleep in the case of an emergency. Furthermore, positioning alarms between high risk rooms and bedrooms provides an early warning pathway. For properties with stairways, alarms should be sited on the flat ceilings at both the top and bottom of the stairs to monitor the spread of fire vertically.

Never install fire alarms within bathrooms or too close to a bathroom door, as steam and moisture can trigger nuisance alarms or cause damage. Similarly, avoid siting alarms on sloped ceilings directly above stairwells, as this can also lead to ineffective detection.

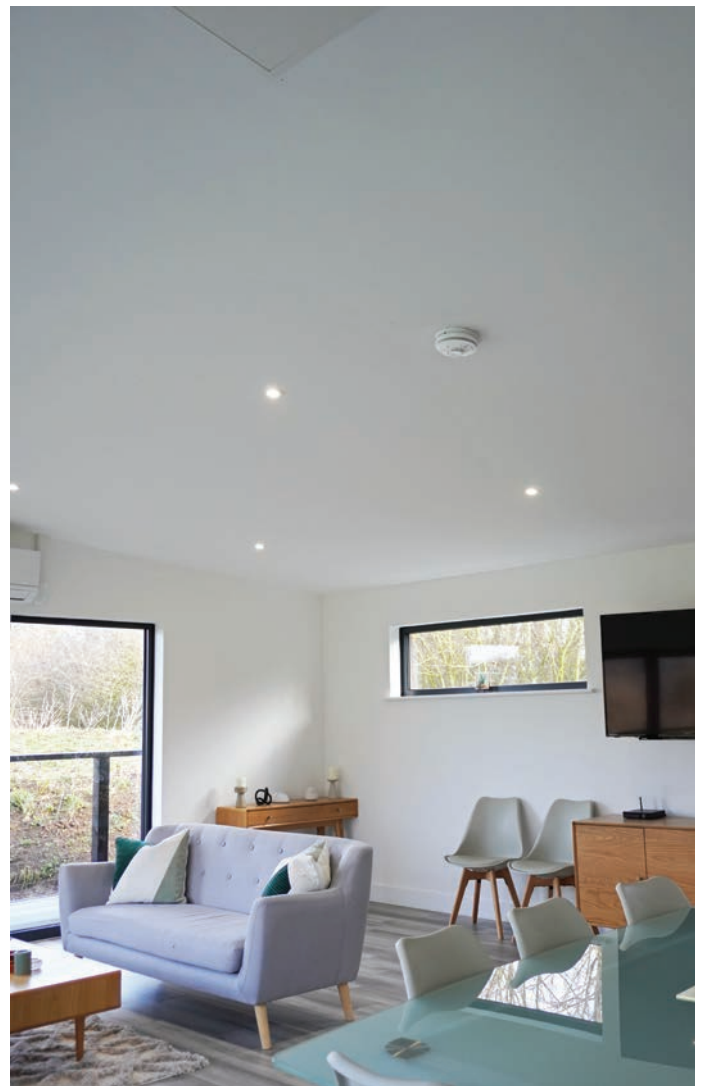
A room with beams requires careful consideration. Where the depth of a beam is less than 10% of the room height, position the alarm either twice the depth of the beam or 500 mm away, whichever is less. If a beam's depth exceeds 10% of the room height, it effectively acts as a wall. In such cases, alarms should be fitted on both sides of the beam. Alternatively, if the beam is less than 600 mm deep, an alarm can be sited on its underside.

CO ALARMS

CO alarms have distinct siting requirements compared to smoke and heat alarms, primarily due to the nature of CO itself. When an alarm is installed in a room with a fuel burning appliance, it should be sited on the ceiling, between one metre and three metres from all potential sources of CO. Like fire alarms, ensure it's at least 300 mm away from walls, light fittings, or obstructions to avoid dead air zones.

If the fuel burning appliance is in a confined space, such as a small boiler room or cupboard, the CO alarm should be sited on the ceiling just outside that room. For instance, where a cupboard is within a bathroom, certain battery powered CO alarms are specifically designed for installation in such environments.

In rooms without a fuel burning appliance, CO alarms should be sited at breathing height. This means they should be placed at a height where occupants



CO alarms have distinct siting requirements compared to smoke and heat alarms, primarily due to the nature of the gas itself; when installed in a room with a fuel burning appliance, they should be on the ceiling



are likely to inhale CO if it's present. If installed within a bedroom, this could be at the height of the bedhead.

THE LEGAL LANDSCAPE

Understanding the legal framework and relevant standards is crucial for compliance and best practice. In the UK, Building Regulations, British Standards, and specific legislation govern fire and CO alarm installations.

BUILDING REGULATIONS

For new builds, extensions, and significant renovations, the Building Regulations are paramount. In England and Wales, this typically means adhering to Approved Document B for fire safety and Approved Document J for combustion appliances, which includes provisions for CO alarms.

Scotland has its own Building Standards Technical Handbooks, and Northern Ireland operates under the Building Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012, Technical Booklets E and L. These documents specify the minimum grade of alarms required, often referencing British Standards.

BRITISH STANDARDS

These provide the detailed technical specifications and best practices.

BS 5839-6:2019 is the cornerstone for fire detection and fire alarm systems in domestic premises. It outlines the different grades of alarm systems (e.g., Grade D1, D2, F1, F2), indicating their power supply and interconnection capabilities. It also specifies different 'categories' of protection (e.g., LD1 for maximum protection, LD2 for medium protection, LD3 for minimum protection). It is important to know these classifications to specify appropriate systems for varying property risks and regulatory requirements. For instance, new builds or properties undergoing a material change of use typically require higher grades and categories.

BS EN 50292 provides guidance on the selection, installation, use, and maintenance of CO alarms. It reinforces the siting advice mentioned earlier, particularly concerning the proximity to potential CO sources and placement at breathing height.

LEGISLATION FOR LANDLORDS

The Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarm (England) Regulations 2015 (updated 2022) place specific legal duties on landlords. They require private and social landlords to install a smoke alarm on every storey of a property used as living accommodation and a CO alarm in any room with a fuel-burning appliance (excluding gas cookers). Alarms must be checked and repaired if found faulty. While primarily aimed at landlords, this legislation sets a benchmark for safety that should be considered in any residential design. Similar regulations exist in Scotland (Housing (Scotland) Act 2014 and associated guidance) and Wales (The Renting Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Regulations 2022).

A DEFINITIVE DON'T

A frequent question asked is whether alarms can be painted. The unequivocal answer is no. Painting an alarm, even subtly, can severely compromise its functionality for several reasons.

If it is a smoke alarm, it is highly likely that paint will enter the smoke chamber. This interference can directly damage the internal sensors or cause nuisance alarms. For CO alarms, paint could completely block the necessary openings, rendering the device entirely useless in detecting this deadly gas.

Furthermore, alarms are not tested or certified with paint on them. This means there's no guarantee how the device will react or perform in a real world scenario if it's been painted. Any alteration from its tested state introduces an unknown variable that could compromise its life saving capability.

Finally, most alarm manufacturers explicitly state that painting or otherwise tampering with the alarm will void its warranty. In the event of a system failure, this could have significant implications for liability and replacement.

CONCLUSION

Integrating fire and CO protection is a fundamental aspect of responsible home design. Understanding alarm siting, complying with standards, and following best practices allows for beautiful, functional, and safe homes.

Jennifer Bickford is a marketing executive at Aico



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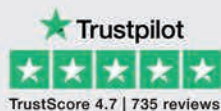
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Dealing with damp

Stephen Boulton at F. Ball & Co. Ltd. provides crucial advice to guard against the problems caused by excess subfloor moisture when installing floor coverings.

Unchecked subfloor moisture, whether residual construction moisture or rising damp, can attack flooring adhesives and floor coverings, causing wood to warp and damaging textile floor coverings by promoting mould and bacterial growth. Not only can this ruin the finished appearance of a flooring installation, but it can potentially cause floor coverings to 'debond', resulting in complete floor failure and present a health hazard.

We frequently receive enquiries from contractors who have been called to rectify a recent flooring installation where floor coverings have begun to lift as a result of unmanaged excess subfloor moisture, and our regional technical representatives often attend site visits where this is the case.

To prevent floor failure due to excess subfloor moisture, it is important to take time to determine subfloor moisture levels and deploy an appropriate moisture management solution, where necessary, before installing floor coverings in a project.

TESTING

We recommend that a moisture test be undertaken as part of any flooring installation, having first prepared the subfloor so that it is suitably smooth, sound and free of contaminants. If the subfloor Relative Humidity (RH) levels exceed 75% (65% if wood floor coverings are to be installed), a moisture management solution will be required to prevent excess subfloor moisture from attacking adhesives and damaging floor coverings.

A quick, non-intrusive way to identify the presence of subfloor moisture is to use a handheld radio frequency moisture meter. If the device indicates the presence of moisture in the subfloor, further testing will be required to determine the precise subfloor relative humidity levels and whether a moisture management solution is required.

The only method of measuring subfloor relative humidity levels with certainty, and the method advocated by British Standards, is to use a calibrated hygrometer. These devices measure the relative humidity of a small volume of confined air in equilibrium with the subfloor, taking into account the ambient temperature.

The device is affixed to the subfloor using butyl tape to create an airtight seal around the base of the instrument. It is then left for a sufficient amount of time to allow entrapped air to reach moisture equilibrium with the screed or base before the unit is switched on. Equilibrium can generally be assumed after leaving the instrument overnight, and readings taken four hours apart are identical. It is recommended that multiple digital hygrometers be placed at regular intervals across the entire subfloor area to avoid the prospect of localised excess moisture not being detected.

WATERPROOF SURFACE MEMBRANES

There are a number of options available to contractors for creating a barrier to protect the floor covering from high levels of moisture detected within the subfloor.

The application of a liquid waterproof surface membrane is the usual solution for effectively controlling damp. The best performing epoxy waterproof surface membranes will isolate excess subfloor moisture where relative humidity values are up to 98%, with a single coat application, which will fully cure in as little as three hours.

It is important to take time to determine subfloor moisture levels



Digital hygrometers affixed to the subfloor at regular intervals to accurately measure subfloor relative humidity (RH) levels

Quicker, two coat, water-based systems are also available that will create an effective barrier against residual construction moisture where relative humidity values are up to 95%. The first coat cures in 15-20 minutes. A further 30 minutes of curing time is required for the second coat.

AN ALTERNATIVE SOLUTION

An alternative solution for dealing with damp is available for situations where a waterproof surface membrane cannot be applied. This may be the case where flooring installations are part of a refurbishment project and screeds are contaminated with oil, other chemicals or old adhesive residues. It is also useful in heritage settings where the subfloor must be preserved.

In these situations, a loose lay isolator membrane can be laid directly onto the subfloor, without the requirement for an adhesive, to provide a barrier to stop excess subfloor moisture from causing floor failure.

These membranes typically have nodules on the underside, creating an airspace to allow water vapour to travel to the edge of a room, into a dry wall or ventilated area, where it can safely escape. A wide range of floor coverings can be adhered to its upper surface. This enables durable new floors to be installed and easily removed at a later date, allowing buildings to be returned to their original state and offering a solution for temporary flooring installations.

NEXT STEPS

When a suitable moisture management solution is in place, contractors can proceed with preparing the subfloor for the installation of new floor coverings. Where an isolator membrane has not been used, this should include the application of a smoothing compound to create a perfectly smooth base for the receipt of floor coverings, remembering to prime beforehand if necessary.

Contractors can proceed to install floor coverings using an appropriate adhesive once the smoothing compound has cured. At this stage, the compatibility of particular floorcoverings and adhesives should be checked to further ensure against floor failure. To do this, contractors can consult the manufacturers' Recommended Adhesives Guide or see the floorcovering manufacturers' instructions.

Stephen Boulton is the technical service manager at F. Ball & Co. Ltd

Sureserve becomes first Aico Platinum Partner, setting benchmark in home life safety

Aico has named Sureserve as its first-ever Platinum Partner, recognising their outstanding commitment to raising standards in home life safety. This prestigious achievement, announced live at Housing 2025 in Manchester, recognises Sureserve's outstanding commitment to compliance, innovation, and excellence in electrical solutions across the UK's housing sector.

The recently launched Platinum Partner initiative is the latest evolution of Aico's dedication to raising industry standards and building long-term, meaningful collaborations. Platinum status is reserved for organisations that meet a diligent set of criteria including technical excellence, quality management, sustainability, and commitment to training.

As the UK's leading energy and compliance services provider to the social housing sector, Sureserve deliver essential heating, renewables, energy efficiency, and compliance solutions. With a national reach that spans local authorities, housing associations, and public sector clients, Sureserve is recognised for its comprehensive services - from fire and gas compliance to smart metering, insulation, and air and water hygiene.

Through close collaboration with Aico, Sureserve has become a standout example of what the Platinum Partner initiative was created to celebrate. The company not only meets but exceeds the required standards, including:

- Aico Gold Standard installer criteria
- Leadership-level participation in Aico's City & Guilds training
- Participation in joint site visits with Aico and clients
- Executive factory engagement at Aico's manufacturing facility
- Verified ISO 9001 accreditation



- Active CSR and sustainability participation
- Ongoing compliance with BS 5839-6

Steve Trafford, sales director at Aico, commented: "Sureserve's achievement as our first Platinum Partner represents the very best of what the initiative stands for - dedication to high standards, continual professional development, and true partnership. Sureserve have a longstanding relationship with the UK social housing sector and an enviable reputation and are helping set a new benchmark in the sector, not just through technical ability but through leadership and vision. We are delighted to announce them as our first Platinum Partner."

Graeme Heenan, managing director of Sureserve Compliance Fire, reflected on the achievement: "We

are privileged to be awarded the inaugural Aico Platinum Partner accreditation. It's a direct result of the close and hugely collaborative relationship between my team and Aico - built on mutual respect, trust, and a shared drive for excellence. Aico's product quality, innovation and support are enablers of our continued growth and exceptional client and resident satisfaction.

This accreditation wasn't easy to achieve - nor should it be. It required a high-level of commitment, it meant myself and my senior leadership team returning to the classroom to achieve Aico's City & Guilds qualification. The team's resilience and ambition made it possible, and I couldn't be prouder. My thanks go to Steve Trafford and the Aico team - together we're making homes and communities safer."

With over 3,700 employees and customers including L&Q Group, Southern Housing Group, Aberdeenshire Council, Haringey Council, and Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, Sureserve is also playing a vital role in the decarbonisation of social housing, offering forward-thinking solutions like heat pumps, energy storage, and solar technologies to lower bills, reduce emissions, and create healthier homes.

As Aico continues to champion innovation and safety through its Platinum Partner initiative, Sureserve stands as a powerful example of what is possible when expertise, collaboration and purpose align.

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