

Secretary's update

TERRY McDERMOTT, NFSN SECRETARY

The world in which we live is becoming a more complex, volatile place and the risks we are facing are more interconnected than any other time in our history, according to the recently published [National Risk Register](#) for the United Kingdom.

It is a fair assessment given recent events, with conflict in Iran affecting global oil supply, the continued war in Ukraine and not least climate change-related incidents such as the prevalence of wildfires across the UK this summer seeing properties being affected.

The Government aims to strengthen the resilience of the UK with an aim of investing in resilience and promoting a "whole society approach" ([UK Government Resilience Action Plan](#)) recognising that we cannot rely on the capacity of our emergency responders alone to meet the needs of our communities in a crisis. This means everyone from the private sector through to the general public will be encouraged to think about becoming more resilient to stave off the impact of crisis and reduce reliance on the state when things such as power outage occur.

The word "fire" features in the national risk register, a quick word search for highlights 94 mentions. Indeed, within the document the Government suggests five tips for preparedness and one of them is to "check your smoke alarm regularly". This is recognition that fires impact resilience of the UK by placing demands on the fire and rescue service that could otherwise be avoided.

This is great advice for the general public, but is it going far enough to make a real difference to the resilience of the nation and the step changes that need to happen to truly make the UK the most resilience country as per the UK Government's own aspiration.

Investment in more robust infrastructure and resilient buildings is going to be needed. Making the case for sprinklers is often a battle, but given the risks identified, the capacity to meet those risks and ever-increasing threats of international interference on UK soil, maybe now the case for sprinklers makes more sense than ever before.

The recent wildfires are a good example of a situation whereby fire and rescue services were stretched to capacity and had limited reserve for further pressures from additional incidents.

What does this mean for the sprinkler sector? Well, it could mean that Government could be more open to



"Resilience is about preparedness, limiting risk and securing business continuity to promote recovery. Sprinklers are at the heart of all of this and really should be part of the solution to UK resilience."

recognising the huge benefit that sprinklers play in holding a fire in check prior to the arrival of the fire service, thereby limiting the fire service resources required had sprinklers not been present. This can only be a good thing if we are facing increased risks and additional pressures on our emergency services.

It could mean that there is recognition that investment in our water infrastructure would make the provision of sprinklers more easily achievable and more cost effective, as we know that sprinklers limit the amount of water used for firefighting, a useful concept at a time when it is predicted the country will be more susceptible to drought and water shortage.

It could mean that a more nuanced view is taken of what buildings would benefit from additional protection determined by use and occupancy and a move towards property protection being a requirement in certain circumstances rather than a choice.

For us in the sector we need to continue to promote the benefits of sprinklers and one of the best ways to do this is to continue to highlight "sprinkler saves" hosted by BAFSA the link below takes you to the site and clicking on the resources tab will bring you to the newsletters and annual reports that have been collated following the sprinkler saves reported by the sector. ¶

bafsa.org.uk/sprinkler-saves

Sprinklers in schools – a cost benefit analysis

Over the summer NFSN published [new research](#) into the cost benefit of sprinkler systems in schools and launched the document at the House of Lords. The independently-researched report has the following key findings:

1 School fires remain a frequent and significant national issue

England experiences 350 school fires per year – around six to seven fires every week – with one classroom affected per fire on average.

2 Evening and night-time fires cause dramatically greater damage

Fires starting out of hours result in two–six times more damage, often affecting multiple classrooms and requiring major rebuilds.

3 Sprinklers are proven to be highly effective

Where sprinklers operate, they extinguish or control 98% of fires, reducing fire damage to one-third of that seen in un-sprinklered schools.

4 Most school fires occur in buildings without any fire suppression

Over 97% of school fires in the last 14 years occurred in schools with no safety system installed.

5 The financial cost of school fires is substantial

Direct and consequential costs exceed £126 million per year, averaging £282,200 per fire—a conservative estimate excluding wider social impacts.

6 Disruption to education carries major long-term economic consequences

Government evidence shows one missed day of school results in £750 of lost future earnings per pupil, making even short closures economically significant.

7 Installing sprinklers is cost-effective even under conservative assumptions

If non-monetised benefits equal £460 per pupil per year, sprinkler installation breaks even – less than the value of one missed school day.

8 Large fires impact community and wellbeing

Case studies (e.g., Ravensdale Infant School) show profound effects on pupil wellbeing, staff stress, exam disruption, and community stability.

9 Fire alarms alone are not sufficient protection

Alarm reliability is 61–72%, and out-of-hours response changes mean that fire alarms alone cannot prevent large-scale damage.

10 False alarms impose a major operational burden

Schools generate 2,400 false alarms per year, each requiring an average of 1.3 fire service vehicles, diverting resources from genuine emergencies.

The launch was well received and the document has been distributed by the NFSN, BAFSA and the Fire Sector Confederation. Since the launch, a letter has been sent to the Secretary of State for Education to request a meeting to discuss the content. ¶

nfsn.uk/protecting-our-schools



SPREAD THE WORD



Members are encouraged to read and distribute the document which will hopefully support discussion on sprinkler provision in new schools with developers and regulators.

[Download a PDF of the document](#)

Sprinkler Saves Review 2025/2026

The **Sprinkler Saves Review** for 2025/2026 is now available to download from [BAFSA's website](#).

This collection of Sprinkler Saves collated by The British Automatic Fire Sprinkler Association (BAFSA) from primary fire data with supplementary information provided by our Fire Rescue Service (FRS) and sprinkler industry colleagues across the UK make this the only available report in Europe that demonstrates the impact AWSS make during a fire incident.

This review serves as an invaluable resource, showcasing the effectiveness of Sprinklers, shaping cultural attitudes, and influencing policy makers, building owners and stakeholders for change to increase the presence of sprinklers within the built environment.

This review is introduced by a foreword from Phil Garrigan OBE KSM, Chair of the National Fire Chiefs Council. He underscores that the review is both informative and inspiring, presenting compelling examples and data that demonstrate the life-saving benefits of sprinkler systems. The review also emphasises the importance of systematically reporting incidents where sprinklers have contributed to safety outcomes.

This publication is part of our continued campaign to drive change promoting real life tangible examples captured by our BAFSA Sprinkler Saves project a dedicated website with over 200 reported incidents raising awareness of how the destructive effects of fire can be mitigated, and in most cases, be prevented through the enhanced use of AWSS. ¶



If you have any questions on how your organisation FRS can contribute to Sprinkler Saves UK please contact Nick Coleshill, BAFSA Sprinkler Saves Coordinator at nick.coleshill@bafsa.org.uk. Visit the Sprinkler Saves website for more saves and information at bafsa.org.uk/sprinkler-saves



A message from BAFSA's chief executive Ali Perry

"Each one of the Sprinkler Saves captured in this document provides a real-world example of the power of fire sprinklers. These are tangible evidence of where sprinklers have been the difference in containing or extinguishing a fire and therefore minimising property damage, protecting the environment and protecting the lives of firefighters and members of the public. This makes me extremely proud to be associated with the fire suppression industry." ¶

bafsa.org.uk

NFSN and the Fire Sector Confederation – from partnership to practice

BY PROFESSOR STEVE MCGUIRK, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, FIRE SECTOR CONFEDERATION
AND SECRETARY APPG ON FIRE & RESCUE

When we wrote for the first NFSN newsletter last year, we described a natural opportunity for the National Fire Sprinkler Network and the Fire Sector Confederation to work more closely together. During 2026 that proposition has begun to turn into practical activity.

The Fire Sector Confederation is now established as a registered charity and neutral convenor across the wider fire-safety system. Its aim is deliberately simple: not to duplicate the work of organisations such as NFSN, BAFSA, the fire and rescue services or professional bodies, but to help connect that work across what we describe as the Fire Chain – from government and regulation, through design, construction and occupation, to operational response, research and learning.

This matters for the issue of sprinklers because suppression is rarely a stand-alone question. It now sits within much bigger debates about building safety, vulnerable people, modern methods of construction, batteries and energy storage, electric vehicles, mass timber and the resilience of buildings and communities. One practical development has therefore been working with NFSN on its closer alignment with the Confederation's Special Knowledge Network structure. The intention is to strengthen the network, not absorb its identity: retaining its specialist expertise and campaigning focus while giving its evidence a stronger connection into the wider system.

Taking the schools case back to parliament

Schools provide a good example. Changes to BB100 and the apparent weakening of the previous expectation around sprinkler provision were raised directly at the APPG's meeting with the fire minister earlier this year. The Group subsequently wrote to both Fire and Education Ministers.

Importantly, the argument has been framed more widely than the cost of rebuilding a school after a fire. The interruption of children's education, displacement of pupils, impact upon families and communities, and the wider public cost all matter. That is precisely why NFSN's work on the continuity of education is so valuable. The 2025 newsletter made the same case pow-



erfully, pointing to both the direct cost of school fires and the much larger consequences arising from lost education.

Parliament needs evidence, not simply assertions

The APPG has also developed a much more systematic programme of parliamentary intelligence and engagement during 2026. Grenfell implementation, the Building Safety Regulator, the proposed Single Construction Regulator, Approved Document B, construction products, competence, fire-risk as-

sessors and emerging technologies are now being monitored continuously rather than simply when an individual issue reaches the headlines. For the sprinkler community, that creates an important opportunity. [Sprinkler Saves](#) and the wider evidence gathered by NFSN and BAFSA provide exactly the sort of real-world evidence Parliamentarians need. The existing project already records cases where systems have controlled or extinguished fires and provides a national evidence base rather than relying simply upon theoretical arguments.

Looking ahead

The Confederation is also developing work with CROSS-UK and the emerging Fire Research Alliance to improve the way the sector identifies emerging risks and connects those risks with research, standards, regulation and policy. That feels particularly relevant to the sprinkler world. Batteries, EVs, timber construction, ageing and vulnerable populations and new energy technologies are not future risks any longer – they are current ones.

The European experience reported elsewhere in this newsletter, particularly around enclosed car parks and timber buildings, therefore deserves attention in the UK. The task now is to make sure the sprinkler argument is neither isolated from the wider building-safety debate nor lost within it.

NFSN brings the specialist knowledge and evidence. The Confederation can help connect it across the system. And the APPG can ensure that Parliamentarians continue to ask the right questions. That is rather closer to the partnership we envisaged a year ago – and, importantly, it is now beginning to happen. ¶

The view from Europe

BY ALAN BRINSON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, EUROPEAN SPRINKLER NETWORK (EFSN)

Each year we see progress in our sprinkler campaigns. One area of common concern is the risk of electric vehicle (EV) fires in car parks, particularly in underground car parks. While the likelihood of a fire may be lower than for an internal combustion engine vehicle, fire spread between vehicles if the EV battery goes into thermal runaway is nearly a certainty. Firefighters would then be faced with enormous fires and the risk of structural collapse of the car park and any building above it. That in turn is a risk to anyone who has not evacuated the structure. Moreover, the resulting damage is disproportionate and societally unacceptable.

For these reasons governments in Italy, Poland and Spain, pressured by firefighters, have proposed a requirement for sprinklers in enclosed car parks, joining many other countries that already have this requirement. The UK is an outlier in not doing so.

Other areas of common concern are wooden buildings, the ageing population and the increased presence of batteries in homes. All can be helped by fitting sprinkler systems. The UK is one of Europe's leaders when it comes to requiring sprinklers in housing and care homes. When it comes to wooden buildings if our government has been slow to provide leadership in fire safety design, insurers and the timber industry itself have been more pro-active.

This is not the case in Spain, where the timber industry references over 600 buildings, very few of which will be sprinklered. Two recent fires in wooden hotels Málaga, one in an unsprinklered IBIS which burned on and off for two weeks and the other quickly dealt with by the sprinkler system, have been instructive, raising the fire risk profile of wooden buildings and the need for



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sprinklers in them.

Standards are an important part of EFSN work. At the request of Norway and Sweden a revision to EN 16925, the European residential sprinkler design and installation standard, will introduce a requirement for sprinklers on balconies. Although the UK does not use this standard the change may be something for BS 9251 to consider. An amendment to EN 12845 has introduced references to EN 12845 part 2 (CMSA and ESFR designs), part 3 (earthquake bracing) and EN 17451 (pump sets), so that the four documents are coherent and can be invoked solely by a reference to EN 12845. Meanwhile work continues on a full revision to EN 12845. The draft is out for

the CEN enquiry (comment stage) and we are already working through anticipated comments from the British and German standards bodies (BSI and DIN).

Conferences are an efficient way to meet many people and gain a lot of knowledge. As such they are popular even though we all attend frequent online meetings. This year we had a record attendance of 600 delegates at Fire Sprinkler International, held in Paris. The UK was well-represented on the programme, in the exhibition and among the delegates. ¶

Fire Sprinkler International returns on 21-22 April 2027, in Madrid. For more information visit firesprinklerinternational.com