



STAC advice on the Grenfell Tower fire

15 June 2017

Advice on air quality and smoke exposure:

PHE has been assessing air quality over the last 36 hours in relation to the Grenfell Tower fire and this shows a minimal wider risk to public health as a result of yesterday's smoke plume. People who have been close to the scene and exposed to smoke from the fire may have experienced irritation to the lining of the air passages, the skin and the eyes, and respiratory symptoms including coughing and wheezing, breathlessness, phlegm production and chest pain. People who have concerns about their symptoms should seek medical advice or call NHS 111.

Advice on odour:

The human nose is very sensitive to odours and often detects odorous chemicals at concentrations in air which pose no risk to health, however odours can be unpleasant and affect wellbeing. Many substances that are perceived as odorous are usually present at levels below which there is a direct toxicological effect. Odours can cause a nuisance to the population possibly leading to stress and anxiety. Some people may experience symptoms such as nausea, headaches or dizziness as a reaction to odours even when the substances that cause those smells are themselves not harmful to health.

Advice on face masks:

As far as possible, exposure to airborne pollutants, such as dust, should be avoided by preventing or minimising exposure. PHE does not recommend wearing face masks for the general public as a method of reducing exposure to air pollution as it is not clear that they would be effective in reducing exposure. Masks can be uncomfortable to use and can worsen symptoms in people with heart and lung conditions as they may find it harder to breathe. Caution is therefore advised when using masks and their use by the public outside of the cordon is not recommended

Respiratory protection for disaster victim identification (DVI) teams:

Information from the London Fire Brigade is that as the majority of fires are now extinguished they are likely to downgrade their respiratory protection for breathing apparatus to respirators later today based on an updated risk assessment. In light of the likely use of respirators by fire brigade staff, DVI teams could adopt a similar approach.

Waste materials:

Information from the fire brigade and local authority indicates that the majority of debris in surrounding areas consists of charred foam insulation. This material is unlikely to present a threat to public health, however precautionary advice has been provided to residents not to handle any material as it may present a physical hazard. PHE will liaise with the Environment Agency and Local Authority as part of the recovery working group on appropriate clean up and disposal of material.