



Freedom of Information Request FOI 23 31

Heritage Building Fires

Query and response:

1. How many heritage building fires have you attended in the past year (2022 or 2021)? If a statistic is unavailable, then could you tell me if heritage building fires are a common incident that your service responds to? My definition of 'heritage building' would include any building (usually a listed building) that is approximately 100 years old or older. Buildings with historical value and which require conservation. Examples would include castles, tudor buildings, victorian buildings etc.

As a Service, we do not record the age of a building and/or if it is listed or not; as a result, we have completed a search on what we do collect which are: mills, thatch properties, and religious buildings

Property Type	2021	2022
Mill	1	1
Religious	1	4
Thatch	13	5

2. Do you provide particular fire safety advice for heritage buildings?

Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service (DWFRS) fire safety teams provide guidance in line with government guides and other sector specific advice upon request. Our inspection regime prioritises life safety and general fire precautions and therefore we would normally signpost the owners or managers of heritage premises to the relevant sections of the guide appropriate to the use of the building (recognising that heritage premises may be occupied as residential, care, public entertainment, assembly or other use, in addition to their status as culturally important or architecturally unique structures).

Our staff undertake regular Continual Professional Development (CPD) which incorporates specific fire safety aspects of heritage buildings as delivered by English Heritage, The National Trust, BAFSA or other appropriate bodies as part of that wider understanding of risk. This enables our staff to provide appropriate guidance on a range of hazards and risks within the built environment. Our Strategic Assessment of Risk acknowledges the importance of heritage premises, including thatched premises as important aspects of our cultural and environmental risk response arrangements and our website provides guidance on thatch fire prevention and considerations for property and life safety.

We do not currently host specific documents or guidance on managing heritage premises in terms of property protection but would signpost to relevant documents or provide advice upon request.



3. Do you think more can be done to help prevent fires occurring in heritage buildings? If so, could you please describe what more could be done?

As with other fire safety law, it is incumbent upon the Responsible Person to take appropriate measures to protect people from the risk of fire and apply the principles of fire prevention to buildings under their control. This also applies to heritage buildings. In many cases there is a balance between the economic return on fire safety measures and the assessment of the value of the asset or indeed its cultural or historic value to society. We recognise also that in some cases, the introduction of people into a building can increase the fire risk but may also be the only reasonable income source to maintain the building in sound structural (or useful) condition e.g. use of older buildings as residential accommodation, opening them up for public use, licensed events etc..

Current legislative framework prioritises life safety which does not always match the needs of some low occupancy heritage premises, and generally falls to the insurance system to drive property protection (and the necessary expenditure to facilitate this). Whilst the fire and rescue service would perform their role to protect the environment (including heritage assets), this is too late in many situations where a fire has already occurred. Inclusion of a duty on the building owner as a Responsible Person to evidence their fire prevention measures for property protection (particularly where structures may be listed or have special status and which may fall outside the scope of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order), may be a consideration although the appropriate authority for enforcing this would need to be determined.

Provision of automatic suppression (sprinkler or misting) systems, coupled with automatic detection and early warning systems into high value premises would be a positive step although the cost may be prohibitive in some cases.

Education and awareness of fire safety for those persons in control of premises remains the most effective way to prevent fires.

Information/Detail accurate on the date provided: 16, March 2023