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**Rt Hon Clive Betts MP
Chair, Levelling Up,
Housing and Communities Committee
House of Commons,
Palace of Westminster,
Westminster,
SW1A 0AA**

10th April 2024

Dear Mr Betts,

Fake Signatures on EWS1 Forms

I am writing to you in response to your letter dated 11th March 2024, in which you laid out various concerns regarding the possibility of fake signatures being used on EWS1 forms during the sale of properties. This was brought to public attention with a number of cases of fraud shortly after EWS1 forms were introduced. You have asked us for clarity on the scale of the problem and how the FIA Building Safety Information Portal (BSIP) provides a practical solution to eliminate these issues.

1. Based on the FIA's work, how widespread do you think the issue of fake signatures on EWS1 forms might be?

Although we learn of these fake documents by third parties and through our own investigations, it is difficult to give an accurate picture of the scale of potential forgeries, however it may help to understand it in the context of the number of buildings that may require an EWS1 assessment, and the number of EWS1 assessments that we have verified.

As per gov.uk¹ there are estimated to be 8,000 residential buildings over 18m high that may require an EWS1 assessment. Additionally, there are a further 50,000 residential buildings between 11-18m on which an EWS1 could be insisted upon despite there being no requirement for buildings under 18m. Currently the FIA has verified circa 1,500 buildings via EWS1 form uploads to the portal by verified assessors. Therefore, there are around 56,500 residential buildings potentially requiring an EWS1 assessment that we have no visibility of. They may already have EWS1 assessments, however none of them have been independently verified unless lenders have undertaken to do these checks themselves.

2. What is the Building Safety Information Portal able to verify about an EWS1 form?

When a form is uploaded to the portal, we check all of the editable data inputs. These include:

- Date of the form.
- Name and signature of the assessor. All assessors registered on the portal will have already undergone verification of their personal qualifications.
- Building address and postcode.
- The rating of the building (A1-B2).

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- The assessor's ability to assess to different ratings dependant on their level of qualification. This is determined at the registration stage for the assessors.
- Amendments to previous form versions.
- The latest form template version is being used.

3. Who, other than the assessor, is able to upload a form to the portal?

Every assessor has a login linked to the email address used at registration stage. Forms are only able to be uploaded using this email to login to the portal. No form is accepted if the name and signature on the form do not match the registered assessor.

4. What, if any, requirements are there for an EWS1 form to be uploaded to the portal, and roughly what percentage of forms are uploaded?

There is currently no requirement whatsoever for forms to be uploaded to the portal. The driving factor is whether a lender requires a form to be displayed on the portal. Based on the figures in the answer to the 1st question, we estimate approximately 2.6% of forms have been uploaded to the portal.

5. If individuals have doubts about an EWS1 form that has not been uploaded, is there any way for them to request or require that it be uploaded to the portal in order to have it verified?

They can certainly request that it is uploaded, however that would require the assessor to first register and pass the various checks to enable them to upload the form.

Alternatively, individuals can contact any of the companies that have a registered assessor to commission them to carry out an independent assessment.

6. What, if any, other ways there are for forms that are not uploaded to the portal to be verified?

In theory, an independent verification by a credible independent organisation could be carried out. In order to do this, an individual or organisation would need to have access to the assessor's professional qualifications. They would need to know which qualifications are valid and to what extent with regards to categories A1-B2. They would then need to cross reference the qualifications against the relevant awarding body.

Once the assessor has been verified, they would then need to check the data supplied on the form as per the information laid out in response to the 2nd question.

7. What are the current fees for uploading an EWS1 form, how are they set, and who typically bears the cost?



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For web form uploads the cost is £100+vat. For PDF uploads the cost is £150+vat. The prices were set to recoup the cost of developing the portal and to cover ongoing maintenance and administrative costs.

The direct upload cost is always paid by the assessor at the point of upload. It is at their discretion as to whether they pass this cost on to their customer which may be the building owner or individual leasehold property owners.

For the engineers to register their credentials so they can upload the EWS1 forms, there is a one off £200 fee.

8. What, if any, support is there available to cover the costs of uploading forms?

None that we are aware of now that that the initial period in which the lenders offered to cover the cost has ended.

9. How successful was the 2021 initiative at ensuring EWS1 forms were uploaded?

As UK Finance estimated around 6,000 forms at the time of the initiative, around 15-20% of these were uploaded during that period. One of the main issues was not the cost, but the availability of suitably qualified fire engineers to carry out the assessments.

10. What is the best estimate of the number of EWS1 forms that are currently not uploaded to the portal, and if they were uploaded would the portal be able to handle verifying the increased number of forms?

As per question 1, there is estimated to be around 8,000 buildings over 18m that require an EWS1 assessment. Therefore, we can confidently say there are at least 6,500 forms yet to be uploaded. When you add in buildings under 18m, that some lenders insist on having an assessment for, that number rises dramatically. The portal is built with the total scope in mind, so an increase in form uploads would not pose an issue.

11. How many, if any, new assessors would have to register with the portal for the first time to upload these additional forms, and do you anticipate any challenges validating the qualifications of these additional assessors?

Currently around 100 assessors are registered on the portal. RICS² estimate the total number of suitably qualified engineers to be around 300. With all 300 engineers registered that would mean each engineer would have to upload an average of 22 forms to the portal to clear the outstanding 6500 buildings over 18m.

No challenges are anticipated to validate the qualifications of additional assessors as we have the manpower (the FIA is the largest fire trade association in Europe) with the relevant skill sets available.



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12. What impact do you expect PAS 9980 to have on the use of EWS1 forms, and any potential for fraud in assessments?

Standalone PAS 9980 assessment could be fraudulent as there is currently little or no verification done on who is carrying them out (therefore the same issue). A report prepared in accordance with PAS 9980 is not intended as an alternative to the EWS1 form – the basic difference is that the EWS1 form is a valuation form (to ascertain whether the building needs remediation works or not) whereas the PAS 9980 appraises the fire risk of external wall construction and cladding. Although, it may be possible to serve as a suitable report to support or inform an EWS1 form. However, any EWS1 form uploaded to the portal will still need to be uploaded by a pre-registered assessor who have had their qualifications verified.

As a brief note as to why the FIA runs the portal; we operate as a not-for-profit trade association and reinvest any surplus to research and public safety from fire. These costs were verified as cost price for the FIA, to undertake the verification work, in an open forum group formed by RICS and UK finance. This is one of the projects we took on as there was not a solution available and we did not want to see the public charged (they are free to download).

I hope this satisfactorily answers your questions and adequately explains the current situation. We remain at your disposal should you require any further advice.

Best Wishes

Ian Moore
Chief Executive Officer
Fire Industry Association

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/building-safety-programme-estimates-of-ews1-requirements-on-residential-buildings-in-england/building-safety-programme-estimates-of-ews1-requirements-on-residential-buildings-in-england>

² <https://www.rics.org/news-insights/building-confidence-how-ews-training-can-help-deal-with-rising-pii-costs>