

## metroSTOR Webinar Summary

### E-mobility - Essential Steps for Landlords

24.09.24

#### Summary

##### Nigel Deacon

This is the seventh webinar we've done on e-mobility; here's a link to the previous recordings: [metrostor.uk/webinars](https://metrostor.uk/webinars) The last one was with Electrical Safety First, and a big shout out to them for the way they've raised the profile of lithium battery safety with government, and started the move towards the control of the sale of new products, which is a tremendous achievement, even though one of the things that this doesn't really address yet is what people do to e-mobility devices after they've been purchased.

E-mobility is now important for many people with their livelihoods, and some for maintaining their independence, and is seen by the government as essential for the decarbonisation of transportation, so it's not going away. We also know that some of them can represent a significant risk to life, whether that's because of poor manufacture, or where they've been misused, damaged or modified. The question I keep asking are these:

- How many of these devices might be stored and charged in resident's flats?
- What condition are they in?
- Are they insured?
- Are they presenting a serious risk or not?
- Is this a risk we're comfortable with?
- And if not, what should we do about it?

I asked Jan to share his thoughts on this, and I really want to hear what you guys are thinking as well.

##### Jan Taranczuk

I'm a corporate member of the Institute of Housing, and the only one who is also an associate of the Institute of Fire Safety Managers, and they accepted me into that august group because I've been banging on about fire safety since Lakanal House. I was vice chair of the London Climate Board when we organised the first ever fire safety seminar in November 2009, as soon as we could after the Lakanal fire, and it's since that point that my interest in the subject has originated. I don't consider myself to be a fire safety expert, I'm just professionally curious. I'm also Vice-chair of the National Social Housing Fire Strategy group for the southeast. They've been heavily involved in national policy and have had an input into a number of documents that have been produced. So if you're able to join, that would be appreciated, and that will give us a greater voice as the new government looks at how it's going to respond to some of the recommendations after Grenfell.

#### Relevant Guidance

[NFCC Mobility Scooter Guidance for Residential Buildings](#)

[NFCC: Fire safety in specialised housing](#)

[NFCC E-bikes and E-scooters Fire Safety Guidance](#)

All of those documents are worthy of a read and of lifting chunks of it out to link into your own policies or procedures that you're proposing to use within your own organisation.

### So what is the fuss about?

Well, the London Fire Brigade very kindly gave me their latest figures a couple of days ago:

Fires in London	2022	2023	So far in 2024
E-bikes	87	155	117
Other lithium batteries	49	83	64
E-scooters	29	28	22
E-cigarettes	5	15	10

So you can see that since 2022 the figures have been going up, so if you haven't already, issue advice to your residents that essentially says, don't trust your electrical kit, you're forced to leave your fridge in your freezer on all the time, but don't charge your computers and your phones overnight, because you just can't trust them.

### Responsibilities

So let's talk about the responsibilities that we've got as landlords, but also tenants. Your tenancy conditions may well have specific reference to the way people should act within their own homes, and there'll be a link to those leaseholders who have rented out their properties to their own tenants as well.

The Building Safety Act only applies to tall buildings at the moment, but I think it's worth reminding everybody that the Act requires residents not to act in a way that creates a significant building safety risk. So I would argue that if you've got a cheapo bike, or one that's been adapted, there is an argument from an landlord's perspective to say well, actually you are going to be acting in a way that creates a significant risk.

And the other issue then is whether having or charging a bike with your own home, if it's potentially dangerous, could that be classed as anti-social behaviour on the basis that if the thing explodes and the vapour blows out under the door, or around the seals at the door, and it affect other people in the building, could that be classed as anti-social?

Another guidance note **GN103** from the London Fire Brigade one is worthy of attention, and is again worthy of nicking words out of If you're going to put in information to your residents.

### Insurance

I don't think that you could legitimately say to a tenant, you can't have that bike in your flat, because in order to enforce that, you're going to have to go through the courts in the end, and the argument will then be whether a judge is going to give you possession on that property, or a court order, because of the bike.

But it occurred to me that one way of dealing with this would be from the financial aspect. Would it be legitimate to say you need to have insurance for your vehicle? Because remember, if you've adapted your bike in any way, the argument would be that you have now become the manufacturer for that bike, and

you have certain responsibilities as a result, so does your insurance cover you in the event of a fire for both yourself in the building or other residents outside of your home?

And then is it legitimate for the landlord to say you need to be aware that we're going to come after you for the costs for both damage to the property and damage elsewhere? Is that an issue that other people have already come across? Is it worth asking whether there has been a change in the way that landlords' insurers are dealing with insurance for buildings because of e-bikes? It has apparently become an issue for some owners of bike shops. A webinar was held on this a couple of days ago by [Allianz](#).

### **Are all E-bikes Dangerous?**

And of course then the issue is, [are all electric bikes dangerous?](#) This particular article argues that they're not. It would appear that bikes that are properly built and maintained are not a problem, it's the cheaper end of the market, and it's people seeking to use those bikes as part of their employment, they're likely to be the ones that are going to be a problem for us as landlords.

### **What are the risks to others?**

So where do we go from a landlord perspective, and what are the risks? Well quite clearly if you're comfortable with your building's evacuation strategy and it's stay put, that's one issue. But if your current building evacuation strategy is simultaneous evacuation, and in London at the moment there's over a thousand buildings with that particular strategy, that is, I would argue, slightly more of a risk.

### **What are you doing?**

What are you doing about checking where the bikes are? Well, if you've got caretakers and cleaners working in the estates, they're your ears and eyes the whole time, and whilst they won't want to be seen grassing up people, conversations about where those bikes or scooters are would be a good start in order to target where they are and to have a process to advise those residents about what the dangers might be.

If you've got a tenants association within the estate, it's going to be worth hammering that home to them as well. And I think the other point that I would make, if you're doing anything about information to residents, if you're able to work with your local fire and rescue service to have some photographs of the damage that has been caused by fires, it's worth having in whatever documentation you produce and what you put on your website, just to highlight to people that innocent looking thing with the two wheels and the little bit of electric attached to it can actually be a bit nasty.

And of course, the toxic vapour is something that those of us who are not chemists do not fully understand, but when you see what appears to be smoke coming from it, it's clearly not smoke, it's a very dangerous dollop of chemical that is heading your way. And there are lots of videos showing where firefighters have been pretty badly affected by that.

It's also worth having a conversation with residents about not charging it in the hallway next to the front door for obvious reasons. There was an example 3 or 4 months ago where the guy had booked into a London hotel with his electric bike. He plugged it in to charge it whilst he was in the room and it started making a noise. So he decided he didn't want the bike making a noise in his room and he put it out in the hallway where it then exploded. Fortunately nobody was hurt, but it's that issue about how and what people do within their own homes and how that affects other people at the block. Is it not an issue which, in my view, is a concern to us all?

## Good Practice

What some landlords have done to prevent any charging taking place in communal areas is they've blocked off any sockets that might exist for communal cleaning purposes so they can only be accessed by members of staff. They've also been looking at creating specific mobility scooter storage areas internally within sheltered blocks with correct compartmentalisation and 60 minute fire doors on them as well. **Tower Hamlets have produced an excellent video**, and I would suggest that if that could be copied and used by others, that would be really, really good.

Another aspect is, when your building is next being risk assessed by your risk assessor, it really would be a good idea, given that the whole risk assessment is about the communal area of the building, to make them aware of the people living within the block who might be more at risk of fire because of the way they live or their circumstances. It will be worthwhile also getting them to identify and comment about the use of bikes within the blocks, because I think this is all about maximising what we know from a safety perspective, and then using that to feed back to residents about the concerns that we have about their own safety.

## Product Recalls

The other thing which goes back to a coroner's report actually, where there were a number of fires being started by faulty fridges or freezers, which then prompted that whole publicity about product recalls and white goods and stuff. And there are certain websites that people can go to to see whether their own product has been recalled because of a safety issue. And if you're not already including that information about product recalls to new tenants as a matter of course, then I would suggest you do so immediately. And in fact, there have already been **e-bike battery packs being identified as being dangerous** and needing to be recalled.

## Tenant Communication

So just to remind those of you who are young enough not to have read the stuff that came out of Lakanal 11 years ago, one of the comments from the judge who was the coroner said that your residents in a block should be given clear information about how to get out of the block. So the first tenancy visit that traditionally we do within six weeks, that really should be the opportunity to do a person centred fire risk assessment for everybody within the property, so that residents know how to get out of the property and you as a landlord become aware of what their issues are in their ability to escape from a fire, both from within the property and whether it occurred outside the property. And that would also then be tying back to basic information about electrical products as well. And that can be done by a housing officer, it doesn't need a fire safety expert, the information's there.

## Upcoming Legislation

For those of you who have been busy doing your day job since the new government came into place, they've been busy in the House of Lords. So there is a **Lithium-ion Battery Safety Bill** that has had its second reading in the House of Lords, and I won't claim to understand the **Product Regulation and Metrology Bill**. So the first is a private member's bill and the second is the official one being issued by the government, and according to the stuff that I've read they're proposing to basically to pull the two together in the committee stage to come up with a document that talks about how the sale of such products is actually regulated. And the **briefing paper** produced by the House of Lords Library is a good one to read. The House of Lords Library and the House of Commons Library are really good sources of information about anything to do with housing that's going through the legislative process.

There have been three coroners prevention of future death reports over the last year which kind of said, look, this is madness, you have to do something about it, this cannot continue. There were two horrendous ones. One was the guy who jumped out the window in Bristol. And then there's the one with the two bedroom flat in Tower Hamlets where it turned out there were 15 single men living in the two bedroom property and one person died as a result of the e-bike being charged up by the front door.

It's probably going to take two years to get this legislation in place, and in the meantime, there are thousands of these things out there on the streets, and as landlords we have to try and keep our residents safe in the way that some of you have started to do already.

So I'm up for shutting up and listening to what people are already doing. Happy to answer questions. That's my email address and phone number, I'm always happy to share information. The fire safety in housing website, if you haven't already joined, join. I maintain that the only way we can get the number of people dying in fires down is by sharing good practice. The reality is that on average over the last few years, roughly 180 people a year are dying in domestic fires, that's 15 people a month. Since Lakeland, 3000 people have died in domestic fires, and since Grenfell it's about 2000. So if you've read Pete Apps book, Show Me The Bodies, well, I can show you 3000 bodies of people who've died in fires under circumstances that don't relate to necessarily to e-bikes, we've got this new danger emerging, and if we're not careful, the number of deaths will go up rather than go down. I'm banging on about it because I think we should reduce the number of deaths.

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Follow us on LinkedIn here: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/nshfsg/>

Website: <https://www.firesafetyinhousing.org.uk/>

Is there somebody on the call from Poplar HARCA? Because I wondered whether they were prepared to join in and share some of the stuff they've been doing.

### **Sally**

Well, what we're very much trying to do, we've put some advice out on the use of mobility scooters on our website. We don't allow them to be charged in communal areas, and we're trying to find safe spaces where people can charge them, and we're trying to identify who's got them, which is quite difficult. We've also got an outright ban on e-bikes in our communal areas, and basically we remove them if they're found.

### **Danielle**

I'm the head of housing, so I manage our housing teams and what we're trying to do is establish where especially mobility scooters are. We're very lucky in that we have a safeguarding team, so they have a huge knowledge of who the most vulnerable residents are, so we can approach them first to find out. Do you have a mobility scooter? Where do you store it? if a mobility scooter is in their hallway and there is a fire, how are they getting out? So we're doing that first and then as and when our housing officers are out on our estates doing tenancy audits, they're making a note of things like any scooters or bikes that are visible, and our estate services teams are very involved in that as well, everybody's looking out for it.

**Jan**

I have to say that basic common sense approach is really refreshing and you ought to be applauded for it, because that whole idea of everybody within the team, whether they're estate services or their tenancy teams, are your ears and eyes about what's going on on the estates. The issue is that if you're a housing officer or you're in the estate services team, or maybe if you're a caretaker, the point is that if you see something that doesn't look right, then they're bringing it to your attention. I think that, quite frankly, is the way forward. And at some stage you guys need to write that down and share it as an article in Inside Housing, because there is a story to be told because we're not doing enough. And bearing in mind I've been around for far too long, what we're not doing enough is sharing information, because sharing is caring.

**Jan**

One of the things we should be doing as landlords is making sure our fire risk assessors really understand what fire risk assessment should be about, and my advice to housing management colleagues in the room is that when you're procuring fire risk assessors, you're not going for the cheapest one but making sure they're fully competent.

**Question**

How do you ensure your PEEP is kept up to date in general purpose housing when you have not kept up to date with a person's change in health and disability?

**Jan**

Really good question. Two things, firstly the PEEP should be the end result of a Person-centred Risk Assessment and can't be done on its own. And two, it's got to be up to date, this is the same for a shelter block as it is for a general purposes block. If you've gone to the trouble of identifying people who are vulnerable in some shape or form, that information is going to need to be kept up to date on a regular basis, i.e. three monthly, six monthly or whatever. And that information has to be a contract between the landlord and the tenant themselves, and it has to be kept up to date in a way that is pertinent to the fire and rescue service, i.e. kept in the GERDA box. The tenant needs to give permission and there has to be a process of keeping it up to date. Fire safety isn't a straight line, it's a circle. Once you've done it you have to go around and do it again. And that really is the key issue.

**Question**

What should we do about residents purchasing mobility scooters and charging them inside their own flats?

**Jan**

To go back to what Kensington and Chelsea have already done, and I did it when I was at Lewes, and that was finding a space within the sheltered block and converting it into a safe compartment in which charging can take place. That, in my view, is the easiest. The other way, of course, and it's appropriate to discuss it since we're on metroSTOR's call, is to see whether you've got space outside the building in order to create an external store for them as well. More difficult for mobility I realise, because quite clearly people have mobility scooters because they can't walk very far, but it's a combination of identifying space either inside or outside the building. And this is all about us keeping ourselves up to date, and then making sure that we're trying to keep our residents up to date.

**Dave Johnson**

Mobility scooters are not a piece of prescribed medical equipment, so you can put rules in place within your building policies to say, actually, before you purchase a mobility scooter, you must check with us that it's suitable to have that in place, and that there is suitable storage available. We work very strongly with residents to make sure that if a customer is buying a new mobility scooter, and even retrospectively, we're asking our customers to register them with us so that we can make sure that they are being stored in the appropriate area and that they're being stored safely.

**Jan**

I'm also happy to share a local authority mobility scooter policy that I wrote in 2015. I can blow the dust off it and send it out to people if they want to see a copy. All you've got to do is make sure it's up to date and change the top and you've got a policy.

**Comment**

Lithium-ion battery disposal is also a potential issue that needs to be looked into.

**Jan**

I think from a social landlord perspective liaising with your local authorities is the way to do that.

**Steve**

I did some risk assessment work on some properties for a private landlord where I had to educate the residents on what to do with disposables and in association with Mark Preston at Southwark, we put together a program whereby Southwark were allowed the the blocks to purchase a fire rated disposable bag for lithium batteries that was collected weekly when the bins were collected, and the bag was then returned for further use to stop people putting it into a blue bin that potentially would then cause an issue and the problem for me was that the bins at the time were inside the building.

**Sally**

We had a few problems on our estates were batteries were put into regular waste bins and then set alight and even the back of the Tower Hamlets bin wagon was set alight at one point because a battery ignited and what we found out was that this is something they call battery building where people have got e-bikes and they soup them up by adding more and more batteries. So we ended up putting a camera up to try to identify who was doing this, but didn't manage to, but this is a problem generally and these things are really, really unsafe.

**Nigel Deacon**

We can provide battery boxes to go outside the blocks because they're clearly marked and they can serve to sort of educate people and raise awareness of the fact that the batteries do need to be separated, as well as providing a convenient place for people to deposit them. Because it's not just what happens on your premises, but pretty much every day across the country in vehicles, at MRFs, in waste disposal facilities, because it's when they get crushed or impacted or something like that as part of the disposal process that some quite serious fires are happening.

We have got a section on our website where we're collecting up all sorts of posters, videos, resources and things which you're welcome to use as part of your campaigns, raising awareness with residents and would welcome the opportunity to share actual policies, templates and such like, if any organisations are willing to share them and make them available to others.

And lastly, if you decide that you do want to make some secure charging provision externally, then we also have a range of charging lockers for mobility scooters, e-bikes, e-scooters as required. So we would of course be very happy to talk to you about those at any point.

So massively appreciate everybody that's joined today, and to Jan, for his time and knowledge, which he has kindly donated. We will share slides, we will share a recording, it sometimes takes a week or so before that appears on our website, but you will be sent a link when it goes live. Please connect and share as much as you can.

Thank you.