

**Briefing Note for DCLG and Building Regs Minister,
James Wharton MP**

**“Dangerous Structures Resulting from Flooding, Explosion,
Vehicular Impact, Subsidence, Fire, Wind and other causes”**

Dangerous Structures and Local Authority Building Control

Extreme weather events seem to be increasing and every year they affect different regions of the country. It is not just that the number of flood and wind damage incidents is increasing. Twice in three years, the country has experienced one in one-hundred year winter storms, high rainfall and flooding. It is the severity of incidents that is worsening. In recent floods in Yorkshire, Cumbria and the West Country the water levels were the highest ever recorded.

Floods and gales are not the only causes of 'Dangerous Structures'; explosion, vehicular impact, subsidence and fire also frequently cause structural failures.

Building Control surveyors are trained in structural engineering, fire and other aspects of construction. In over 90% of councils it is the Building Control team that provides surveyor call-outs to assess the situation, advise on evacuation and safety, advise the blue light services to ensure their safety, then commission and direct shoring, demolition and making safe. This is not widely understood – because it tends to be Chief Fire Officers on the TV, the assumption is made that they make all the decisions on structural integrity. In fact, this is done by local authority surveyors. Senior fire officers will check with Building Control about structural integrity and when it is safe for people to enter a building for search and rescue. Similarly, where structures are unsafe, it is the Building Control surveyor who will direct contractors either for shoring or demolition work.

This task comes with many issues in identifying property owners, checking if there is insurance cover, helping people who are distressed, sometimes in shock, hurt or in danger. This will involve young people, elderly people, children or business premises at any time in the day or night. Traditionally, Building Control teams in local authorities organise 'call-out' rosters for out-of-hours incidence and the whole team would be expected to help during working hours.

It is quite common for the 'dangerous structures' response to be organised using a cross-boundary agreement for mutual support between local authorities. Particularly 'out of hours', there may be a pooled response covering 2, 3 or more councils. In a minority of cases, only about 3%, this function is outsourced or there is a different Technical/Engineering team in a local authority which has the responsibility.

Although local authority building control is in competition against private sector approved inspectors, these AI's have no role in public protection and no involvement in dangerous structures. The training and costs of providing this public protection is part of a local authority building control team's overhead – an overhead not borne by the private sector.

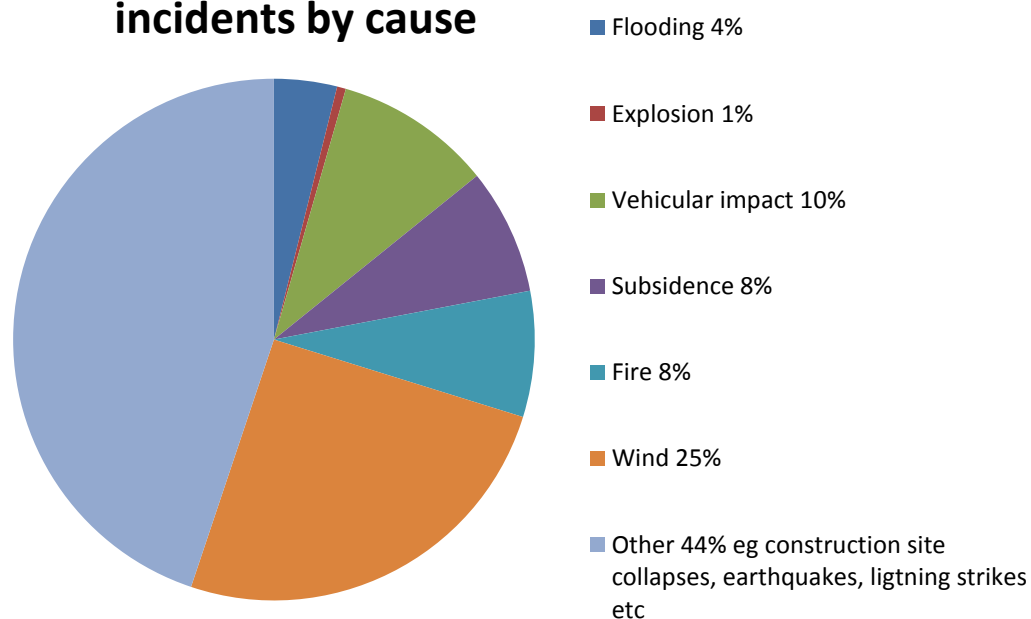
To establish the current position in England & Wales, LABC has conducted a survey by asking members to complete this form. This was the simple survey:

LABC Dangerous Structures Survey 2015/16	
Name of Authority:	
Your Name:	Job Title:
Number of 'on call' surveyors – During working Hours:	Out of hours:
Total number of dangerous structure call outs received from 1 st January 2015 to date.	
Out of these, the number of dangerous structure call outs from 1 st January 2015 to date which were received <u>outside</u> of normal office hours.	
Of these how many were as a result of:	
Flooding	
Explosion	
Vehicular impact	
Subsidence	
Fire	
Wind	
Other (please specify)	
<p>Please provide us with a brief description of the 5 most serious incidents (please add more if you wish). Tell us such things as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How many buildings / structures / people were affected, • How many staff hours were involved in dealing with the incident, • Were you simply involved with the structural issues or did you and your team act in a wider, local authority type public assistance and protection role? • Up-front costs £ allocated by you to remedy the situation eg shoring • Add a photo if you have one 	
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	

Key Statistics from England & Wales for 2015

- Stats relate to 'incidents' not the scale of incidents (a call-out could be for an emergency affecting 1 or 5,000 properties)
- There are currently 2880 'on call' surveyors in working hours
- There are 960 'on call' surveyors outside working hours
- In the 12 months of 2015 there were a total of 22,080 call-outs (all types) in working hours
- In the same period there were 3200 call-outs outside working hours

Breakdown of dangerous structures incidents by cause



Examples of Dangerous Structure work by local authority building control teams relating to “Floods”

Calderdale: “Boxing Day” Flooding

The Borough of Calderdale was subject to heavy and unremitting rainfall during the pre-Christmas period and Christmas Day, landing on already saturated land, resulting in the overtopping of the Rivers Calder and Ryburn, together with all their tributaries. It resulted in the highest river levels ever recorded, with 1.5m of water in the high street at Hebden Bridge and 1.8m of water in Burnley Road at Mytholmroyd. 10% of the Boroughs dwellings were inundated. 42 incidences of dangerous buildings and structures were reported and attributed to the impact of the floods, with an additional 8 incidences of land slip due to the steep nature of the topography, the saturated ground and the historic incidences of unstable land.

One building located on the river bank of the Calder was washed away, whilst many more were damaged or their foundations scoured by the flood waters. Other impacts of the flooding included:-

- 5315 Homes damaged
- 2609 Commercial premises damaged
- 4 Schools inundated
- 20 Craft sunk or damaged, including people’s homes
- 4 Highway bridges collapsed
- 2 footbridges damaged and closed
- 5 Highways closed, one remains closed still due to land slip
- Highway network infrastructure damaged, including collapsed retaining walls, street furniture, lamp standards and 10 sets of traffic lights inundated

The Building Control Surveyor operating the ‘on call’ rota spent 25 hours on site during the three days of the Christmas bank holiday and we are still dealing with issues resulting from the flooding and land slip.

Costs counted in £m’s with 5315 households disrupted and 2609 commercial premises affected.

BC staff time estimated at 500 hours.

The Scout Road land slip also occurred during the period of the Boxing day floods, again caused by heavy rain, threatening 20 homes (families are still not able to re-occupy) and a school and closing Scout Road, which remains closed today.

A majority of the homes together with the school remain closed with temporary accommodation being used for residential and educational use. Most of the land over which the land slip occurred is in private hands, but adjacent land, together with a former land fill site, is owned by the local authority. Traditionally the land has been unstable, with areas of land slip annotated on the

Geographical Survey maps. The former tip contains asbestos contamination and is being monitored. Consultant Engineers working for the authority are liaising with the HSE and considering remedial action to safeguard the homes, school and highway. Initial estimates suggest a cost of circa £750,000.00 for an engineered solution to protect against the effects of further land slip.

BC time committed during the emergency was 37 hours.

Bradford

Partial collapse of Public House due to flood water (Started out of hours Boxing Day floods). Former Royal Oak Inn Mill Hey, Haworth. Flood water entered building which filled the partial basement area. The pressure of water burst the wall causing partial collapse. Approximately 15 hours of Building Control Staff time. Massive disruption to village residents and businesses occurred. Police and fire services attended as well as Highways staff from the council to instigate emergency Road Closures. No costs incurred because main elevation affected was adjacent to a river and Road was closed. Follow up shoring and repairs instigated by owner and his builder.



Arun

Twelve properties initially evacuated due to river flood wall breach in January. So far 40+ hours Building Control officer time spent on this incident. The Building Control team continues to be on hand inspecting and monitoring a difficult situation to be able to alert other parties should the breach worsen and adversely affect local properties. This is an on-going incident and whilst only limited

structural damage to prominently affected properties has been determined so far, Building Control has a concern that with approaching spring tides the scouring out of the exposed the river bank may well compromise adjacent property foundations. A variety of different insurers are involved and no solution has been agreed.

