

NEW ZEALAND (/NEWS/NATIONAL)

## Fatal Wellington hostel fire: Fire alarms did not sound at scene, resident says

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Photo: RNZ / Samuel Rillstone

A resident of a Wellington hostel where a fatal fire occurred (<https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/489973/wellington-hostel-fire-multiple-people-dead-several-injured-at-newtown-s-loafers-lodge>) in the early hours of Tuesday morning said the fire alarms often went off, but not when they were most needed.

Emergency services have confirmed multiple fatalities following the fire at Loafers Lodge on Adelaide Road in Newtown.

Police said their initial assessment was that the number of deaths was fewer than 10, but they could not be any more specific at this point.

The building was unsafe, and until they could enter and reconcile numbers of people who were safe they were not in a position to determine how many people were deceased or unaccounted for.

P Fifty-two people were taken out of the building and at least five were rescued from the roof, but others remain unaccounted for.

At least five people were taken to hospital, two in a serious condition.

P Lodge resident Chris Fincham told RNZ fire alarms would go off regularly in the building, but this time none sounded.

Photo: RNZ / Samuel Rillstone

The only reason he knew something was happening was because someone in the hallway shouted a warning, he said.

"I heard a voice coming down the passageway saying 'evacuate, evacuate, the place is on fire' - and I didn't think much of it because the fire alarms would go off two or three times a week and we'd just ignore it.

"But then when I heard this guy, or this person, screaming 'there's a fire, evacuate', I sat there for about five minutes and then I put my shoes on, got my wallet together, and I thought maybe I should leave."

Fincham lived on the second floor of the three-storey building. He said there was no fire escape outside his window, and he used the main stairs to leave.



He was worried about his friend, whose room was two doors down and who was incapacitated, but police reassured him the man was out of the building.

Fincham said he always felt the building was a "death trap" because there had been frequent problems with water and electricity.



Photo: RNZ / Samuel Rillstone

"I didn't feel particularly safe."

Another man staying at the hostel has described crawling on the ground through a smoke-filled hallway to reach a stairwell.

The man, who wanted to be known only as Chris, said he heard his neighbour yelling about the fire and opened his door to smoke.

"I grabbed my hat on the way and just started crawling - it was hard to crawl because there was only that much airspace on the ground."

He was worried about a number of elderly people who were staying in the building and might have struggled to make it out.

"For me, it was hard, just that little distance, it was a struggle. You've got people in there like 80, 90, who aren't able to look after themselves, especially in a fire, they will struggle."

Wellington mayor Tory Whanau, speaking at the scene of the fire, said people who made it out had been given food, warm clothing and hot showers at a shelter.

The majority of these residents have been sent to a safe shelter.

"It's absolutely worst-case scenario, an incredibly tragic situation.

"My heart goes out to the friends and whānau of those who have been impacted, and of course our Fire and Emergency team who have had to go through this and no doubt will be feeling a lot of trauma over this incident."

Whanau said she will be waiting to see the investigation results of this incident - but it was concerning to hear from one resident that they did not hear alarms go off.

"It's incredibly concerning and possibly unacceptable if that's the case."

Whanau said the building was unsafe and checks will need to be made before crews can re-enter.

"They were able to get in there this morning but of course it was full blaze. They are just leaving it for now, my understand is that there is a high possibility that the roof might cave in so some checks need to be made before we send them in to yet another dangerous situation."

Wellington Central MP Grant Robertson said news of the fire was "absolutely devastating" to wake up to.

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"My heart goes out to everyone who has been hurt and to the friends and families of the victims. If you are in the neighbourhood of the Loafers Lodge (just by corner of John St and Adelaide Rd) please heed the warnings about staying indoors and shutting windows.

"And those in the wider area are recommended to wear a mask due to asbestos risk.

"Obviously there will be thorough investigations of what has happened here, but for now the most important thing is that everyone stays safe and we look after those who has been affected."

According to the Loafers Lodge website, the building has 92 rooms, as well as lounges and kitchens for guests to use, and offers offers short-term and long-term accommodation. There are three floors of accommodation above the ground floor.