

What and Why Counts as 'Safe Enough'

A PHILOSOPHICAL LOOK AT FIRE RISK MANAGEMENT



Ethics in the Flames

A SHORT ABSTRACT Fire risk management is often seen as a matter of technical precision and operational efficiency. Yet this framing overlooks the profound ethical questions at its core that are exemplified at this poster.

This field is undergoing a quiet but necessary transformation. While the ethics of healthcare or road safety are widely debated, fire risk management has remained largely untouched by systematic ethical inquiry. That's beginning to change.

By introducing philosophical reflection, particularly through an approach known as engaged philosophy, we can begin to reframe fire risk not just as a technical or economic challenge, but as a domain of moral and political judgement. This includes questions of justice, shared responsibility, and the ethical standing of non-human life.

This is not about adding abstract theory to practice. It's about clarifying the values already at play and making room for more inclusive, transparent, and context-sensitive decisions.

Who and what gets saved?
Who gets what and why?
What does 'safe enough' imply?
Whose job is it, really?
Who gets a say in staying safe?

- Whose or what fire safety matters most when fire strikes?
- How are fire safety resources really distributed?
- What counts as acceptable protection and for whom?
- Where does responsibility really lie?
- Whose voices shape fire safety decisions?

DILEMMA

A commercial precinct gets retrofitted with sprinklers after lobbying.	A school for disabled children barely passes fire inspection.
Evacuation plans prioritise human life but not pets.	Owners risk their lives to stay behind.
High-income areas get community fire briefings.	Low-income areas receive leaflets.
A care home's escape plan fails. Staff say they were never trained.	The manager blames budget cuts imposed by the local government.
Livestock and pets are rescued.	Wildlife and ecosystems are sacrificed.
Residents in high-rise flats raise alarm about cladding, years before a deadly blaze (Grenfell Tower).	



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Brandforsk is a donation-funded foundation whose research school bridges academia and the fire and rescue services. It aims to both advance knowledge and translate research into practice, creating opportunities to identify critical issues and shape real-world outcomes. This research is co-funded by Brandforsk through their research school for PhD studies in collaboration with Södertörn Fire and Rescue Service (SBFF) and KTH Royal Institute of Technology in Sweden.



Södertörns Fire and Rescue Service, SBFF, Stockholm Sweden.
www.sbff.se
Division of Philosophy, KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm Sweden
www.kth.se
Brandforsk Research School, Sweden
www.brandforsk.se



Fancy a philosophical spark?
Let's ignite a conversation!

MATEUSZ SOSNOWSKI
B.Sc., M.Sc., PhD cand. (Philos.)
BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN FIRE PROTECTION ENGINEERING
MASTER OF SCIENCE IN RISK MANAGEMENT AND SAFETY ENGINEERING



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