



**The scene from Camden High Street on Saturday night, where dozens of people looked on in horror at the scale of the blaze**



**It's a miracle nobody died:**

***Safety alert as Camden Town comes to terms with devastating market blaze.***

**FIRE inspectors last night (Wednesday) went door-to-door ordering traders to step up safety measures at their shops and stalls in the wake of the devastating blaze which ripped through Camden Town on Saturday night.**

Scores of businesses were handed a copy of regulations which explain how a change in the law has made it their individual responsibility to keep the neighborhood's famous markets and surrounding shops as safe from fire as possible.

The move came as police suggested that investigators are close to ruling out arson and are just waiting on forensic evidence.

Amazingly, nobody was hurt in the ferocious fire which began in the Canal market close to Camden Lock, wiping out dozens of stalls before spreading to the nearby Hawley Arms, leaving the pub in flames.

While firefighters have been praised for limiting the size of the damage, there is a growing feeling that only the fortune of lucky timing prevented a more catastrophic outcome. If the blaze had started just a few hours earlier the rush to evacuate would have been even more chaotic and fraught with increased danger.

Fire safety in the busy markets could ultimately be in the hands of individual traders and that since a change in the law at the end of 2005 responsibility for safety has shifted away from the Fire Brigade. It is now up to each trader to meet fire codes and pay for any measures to make their stall or shop safe.

“It is self-regulatory and requires the person in control of premises to undertake fire risk assessments, and where appropriate, act upon the significant findings,” a

Fire Brigade spokesman said:

While there is no suggestion that any individual trader acted inappropriately, senior politicians at the London Assembly – as high up as deputy mayor Nicky Gavron – have demanded private briefings on the standard of fire safety in the Camden Town area, Holborn and St Pancras. Frank Dobson MP has gone further and called for a summit with senior staff at Camden Council, the Met police, the Fire Brigade and the area’s major landholders to make sure that there is no risk of a similar incident.

He said that he had warned that Camden Market could be the scene of a fire tragedy for decades, adding: “This should provide an opportunity for a cool, calm and serious look at the whole question of the safety and policing of the market.” Camden Market Holdings (CMH), the company which owns the canalside land, said it was not their responsibility to make sure every stall constantly met fire regulations.

Piers Codling, the company’s surveyor, said: “We are responsible for the overall grounds but individual traders are responsible for their own stalls.

“We walk around to make sure things are safe but you could go around the market and tell a trader to stop doing something silly and he may stop while you are there – but once you are gone he might start doing it again.”

He added: “It would be unthinkable that the Fire Brigade would allow something like Camden Market to operate if it wasn’t safe.”

It is thought that a gas pipe or gas canisters at the back of the market accelerated the fire and caused the dramatic plumes of fire and smoke.

Conservative leader Councillor Andrew Marshall said there was a “fine line” between making the markets “ultra ultra safe” and losing the relaxed nature of the rows of stalls.

He said: “If somebody was storing things in the wrong place then we need to know about it, but the important thing is that nobody was hurt here and we will do what we can to help the traders come back from this.”