



Ministry of Housing,
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Dear Tony,

Thank you for your letter of 22 June to the Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP, on behalf of the London Assembly. I am replying as the Minister of State for Housing.

I would like to thank you for your concern on fire safety, and your work as chairman of the London Assembly in supporting fire safety in London. I want to reassure you that the Government shares your concerns around fire safety in high-rise buildings, and is determined to ensure that everything is done to prevent anything like the Grenfell Tower tragedy from ever happening again.

In the wake of the Grenfell Tower tragedy the Government commissioned an independent, forward-looking review of building regulations and fire safety led by Dame Judith Hackitt. The independent review looked at the regulatory framework around the construction, maintenance and ongoing management of buildings in relation to fire safety.

In her final report, published on 17 May 2018, Dame Judith was clear that the current system is not fit for purpose. She called for major reform and a change of culture, with the onus more clearly on everyone involved to manage the risks they create at every stage, and government doing more to set and enforce high standards. Dame Judith's final report is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/independent-review-of-building-regulations-and-fire-safety-final-report>.

The Government agrees with Dame Judith's assessment and supports the principles behind the report's recommendations for a new system. As part of this work we held a consultation, *Amendments to statutory guidance on assessments in lieu of test in Approved Document B (Fire Safety)*. The consultation sought views on significantly restricting or banning the use of desktop studies and closed on 25 May. We are currently considering the responses we received and will report in due course.

We have been clear that inappropriate use of desktop studies is unacceptable, and we will not hesitate to ban them if the consultation does not demonstrate that they can be safely used.

Turning to funding, we have announced that we will fully fund the removal and replacement of dangerous ACM cladding on buildings over 18m owned by councils and housing associations, with costs estimated at £400m. We are working with colleagues in the GLA, who will distribute this funding in London.

We will continue to provide financial flexibilities for local authorities for essential work. Building owners will need to determine what measures are essential as part of a whole fire safety strategy for each individual building. They will need to consider, for example, expert advice, any directions or advice from the fire and rescue service, and other fire safety measures present.

With regards to the private sector, building owners are responsible for ensuring the safety of their buildings and their residents. Government and local authorities will monitor and hold them to account for this where they have unsafe ACM cladding systems. We have made it clear that we expect building owners in the private sector not to pass costs on to leaseholders. The Secretary of State recently held roundtables with leaseholders to understand their concerns and with industry to discuss the barriers to remediation and potential solutions. We are considering the proposals made and have not ruled out any options for ensuring costs are not passed on to leaseholders.

Thank you for sharing your report, *Never Again: Sprinklers as the next step in fire safety*. Fire suppression systems such as sprinkler and water mist systems can form an effective part of an overall fire strategy, particularly in tall buildings, where they are provided in accordance with the relevant British Standard (BS9251, BS8458 and BS8489).

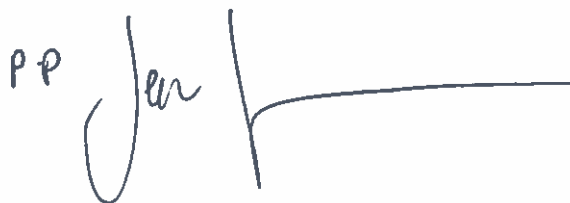
Since 2007, sprinklers have been required in all new high-rise blocks of flats over 30 metres. However, an appropriate level of fire safety can be achieved without the need to retrofit sprinklers. The department wrote to all local authorities and housing associations in 2013 asking them to consider a coroner's report recommendation that they should consider retrofitting sprinklers in existing high rise residential buildings. Building owners must take advice from relevant experts and decide whether or not to retrofit them.

Where there is a risk of external fire spread via the external walls of a building, a sprinkler system or water mist system should not be assumed to be an alternative to remedial work to the cladding system.

Finally, in regards to combustible cladding, we have said that we intend to ban the use of combustible materials in external walls of high-rise residential buildings, subject to consultation. The consultation ran from 18 June to 15 August and we will publish our response shortly. The consultation can be viewed at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/banning-the-use-of-combustible-materials-in-the-external-walls-of-high-rise-residential-buildings>.

Thank you again for your support and cooperation with work on building safety. I look forward to continuing to work with you and the GLA to ensure residents of tall buildings are safe, and feel safe, in them.

pp 

KIT MALTHOUSE MP