



LONDON FIRE BRIGADE

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Mrs Laura Johnson  
Director of Housing  
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London Fire Brigade is run by the  
London  
Fire and Emergency Planning  
Authority

Date 6 April 2017

Dear Mrs. Johnson,

### TALL BUILDINGS – EXTERNAL FIRE SPREAD

The fire at Shepherd's Court in Hammersmith on 19 August 2016 received widespread coverage in the media, in the main because the cause of the fire was due to a faulty appliance that was subject to a product recall, an issue which the London Fire Brigade has been campaigning on. However, I am also drawing this fire to your attention to highlight the external spread of the fire that occurred.

My predecessor, Assistant Commissioner Steve Turek, wrote to housing providers in March 2009 about a variety of matters relating to fire safety in residential housing blocks. One of those matters was replacement double glazing and the associated replacement of spandrel and filler panels on the external faces of blocks of flats with floors above 18 meters in height. In the case of this fire, we believe such panels were a contributory factor to the external fire spread.

We have seen a number of cases where it appears, on the basis of the information available to us, that the level of fire protection to the external face of the building did not comply with the requirements of Part B of the Building Regulations insofar as they seek to limit the speed with which a fire can travel and spread over the external face of a building or may contribute to a fire.

Testing of panels has found that the combustibility of the composition of the panels at Shepherd's Court did not meet the levels expected for conformity with the building regulations. On testing it was found that panels may deform or delaminate exposing any combustible core or constituent material resulting in the panel becoming involved in the fire and allowing the fire to spread and enter flats other than the flat of origin of the fire.

In many instances, how these panels came to be used is not clear due to the length of time since installation. However, we have noted that the glazing used in such replacements has usually been subject to certification under a Competent Persons Scheme for building regulations compliance. It may have been assumed that the spandrel and in-fill panes were also covered by the certification. Our understanding is that these Competent Person Schemes in fact only cover glazing, roof lights and doors containing more than 50 per cent glazing. It is of note that guidance to support some Competent Person Schemes does not mention the need to ensure compliance with section B4 (External Fire Spread) of the Building Regulations and instead focused solely on use of windows as means of escape in case of fire.

In the light of fires that have occurred, I would urge you to consider carefully your arrangements for specifying, monitoring and approving all aspects of future replacement and improvement to building facades and construction of new buildings for which you are responsible. Contracts for the provision and installation of replacement elements of building facades, including insulation, replacement double

glazing and associated spandrel and in-fill panels must ensure compliance with **all** parts of Part B if they are to secure public safety and minimise fire losses.

I would therefore strongly urge that you consider this issue as part of the risk assessment process for premises under your control. I suggest that you make sure all relevant information about any replacement window and facade schemes is fully available to fire risk assessors. Where no reliable information is available for a given property, it is our general expectation that a strategy to assess the risk and where necessary implement short, medium and long term actions to address the risk. This assessment will need to take account of other fire safety measures already in place in the building as well as potential mitigation measures to ensure that any potential fire spread does not pose a risk to health and safety.

Yours sincerely,



**Dan Daly**  
**Assistant Commissioner**  
**Fire Safety Regulation**

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