

Grenfell Action Group

Working to defend and serve the Lancaster West community



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DIVIDE AND RULE

Posted on June 14, 2013



The TMO recently apologised to residents for the “distress and inconvenience” experienced as a result of the near catastrophic power surge that occurred on the 29th May. However, we are not satisfied with their ongoing refusal to facilitate a residents meeting, and their obvious attempt to divide and rule the Grenfell Tower community. When they failed to respond to our two most recent emails we again wrote to Paul Dunkerton on the morning of 12th June:

“We would like to express our collective disappointment that the TMO has chosen to ignore our request for an emergency resident meeting (made by emails on the 30th May and the 6th June) to allow those residents impacted by the recent power surge to come

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together and question the TMO.

Residents have not received any sort of update from the TMO for more than a week now and we demand the opportunity to ask the TMO why no action was taken by our landlords when the power surge problems first surfaced despite the fact that they were aware that residents had reported electrical appliances blowing up and catching fire.

We also want to know what caused the power surge, assurances that the problem has been properly rectified and how the TMO intend to compensate residents who have lost electrical equipment. At present, many residents have been left without washing machines, computers, televisions, etc and have no idea how the TMO intend to deal with this problem. This is an entirely unsatisfactory situation that the TMO need to address without further delay.”

We received the following response from Mr Dunkerton, on the afternoon of the same day:

“Firstly I would like confirm that a temporary repair to electrical supply has been made and the building is safe from power surges. We have been in contact with many of our affected residents on an individual basis but I apologise for not communicating more widely.

We are undertaking inspections of electrical supply within all the affected flats, which will form part of our Periodical Electrical reports and will inform any insurance claims and applications. This does take some time due to residents’ availability for access. I’m also currently in the process of managing tests of all faulty electrical equipment reported by residents to determine whether they can be repaired. In the meantime we have contacted residents with faulty freezers or fridges individually to ensure they can get by with food.

We are unable to hold a public meeting just yet as there will be a lot of questions which we are not in a position to answer until all the inspections and testing have been completed.

I am working with my management team to draft a letter with the latest information on our action since the power surges, which we intend to send to residents this week.

I would much appreciate if you allowed me time to complete the above to ensure conclusion to this unfortunate situation.”

Mr Dunkerton’s response appears to us to be a classic example of divide and rule, intended to discourage any organised response from residents by isolating us, and dealing with us one-to-one, rather than as a collective. We will, of course, be writing back to him to inform him that this is not acceptable, and that we believe the two weeks that the TMO has already had is long enough to come up with some answers.

We also strongly believe that the only way for us to exercise any power or control, in circumstances such as these, is by coming together to collectively demand the answers that we need, and to which we are entitled.

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Residents are suffering because they have had their electrical equipment destroyed and so far the TMO is refusing to admit liability and accept responsibility for replacing these items. Meanwhile, impacted residents have to make do without their computers, washing machines, televisions, fridges, etc... with no indication of when this issue will be resolved.

There is also a crucial issue of health and safety involved here, and there is good reason to suspect incompetence and/or negligence by the TMO and their contractors.

This might be a good time to remind officers of both the TMO and RBKC of the Lakanal House fire disaster that claimed the lives of three women and three children in 2009. According to evidence heard by the Lakanal inquest earlier this year, the fire was caused by a fault in a television set in one of the flats – so there is no doubt that electrical faults can and do cause lethal fires in highrise blocks. The Lakanal inquest was also highly critical of the negligence of the landlords – the local authority – which contributed significantly to the tragic outcome of the Lakanal incident.

You can read the Lakanal story here: [Lakanal – Daily Mail](#)

In the case of Grenfell Tower it seems most unlikely that the fault was due to someone's television set. On the contrary there are strong indications that the electrical supply to Grenfell Tower was seriously compromised and in a highly volatile and dangerous condition for several weeks before the incident on 29th May. Any one of the power-surge incidents that occurred throughout that period might have caused a serious outbreak of fire, and the underlying fault was almost certainly caused by the incompetence and/or negligence of the TMO and their electrical contractors.

Can the TMO and RBKC really be confident that their emergency systems would have prevented serious injury and/or loss of life under such circumstances? We think not. It is past time that they woke up to the fact that their fire safety arrangements, particularly in blocks like Grenfell Tower, rely on inadequate and obsolete fire escape routes and associated emergency plans, and call centre staff whose feckless complacency cannot be trusted in emergencies.

This would not be the first time the TMO has tried to manage, minimise and cover-up dangerous negligence at Lancaster West. We should not accept this.

Perhaps we should now be demanding an independent investigation of these events. We won't get the answers any faster that way, but we might eventually get the truth of what happened and who was at fault.

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