

Fresh call for sprinklers in tower blocks following Grenfell

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Updated building regulations should require that all new buildings over 18m tall be fitted with sprinklers to avoid another tragedy like Grenfell, an influential London Assembly committee has said.

In its report, *Never again: Sprinklers as the next step towards safer homes*, the London Assembly Planning Committee has called for updated building regulations – currently being reviewed by Dame Judith Hackitt – including a requirement for all new buildings over 18m tall to be fitted with sprinklers.

Grenfell Tower was not retrofitted with sprinklers during its refurbishment in 2016. The British Automatic Fire Sprinkler Association (BAFSA), says it would have cost £200,000 to add a sprinkler system to the tower.

The committee also called for automatic fire suppression systems (AFSS), such as sprinklers, to be installed in all existing tall buildings in England when they are refurbished.

The report suggested London mayor Sadiq Khan should set up a £50M sprinkler retrofitting fund to help the capital's local authorities ensure all high risk buildings in the capital are retrofitted with sprinklers over the next five years.

Report author Navin Shah said he understood that immediately retrofitting all buildings with sprinkler systems would be too costly. In London alone, retrofitting buildings over 30m tall with sprinkler systems would cost £500M.

“What happened to Grenfell Tower and the people who lived there must never be allowed to happen again. Fire is unforgiving and we must not be complacent about its tragic consequences,” said Shah.

“The government needs to set out a clear road map towards making AFSS mandatory in England.”

A Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government spokesman said: “Public safety is paramount which is why, following the Grenfell tragedy, we set up a comprehensive building safety programme to ensure a fire like this can never happen again.

“Building Regulations guidance has, since 2007, said that all new high rise residential dwellings over 30m in height should have sprinklers.”

Meanwhile, researchers named Grenfell Tower as the world's most controversial project for 2017 in environmental, social and governance terms.

Research firm RepRisk ranked Grenfell Tower first out of 10 projects, including one where local construction workers were left in an area threatened by ISIS while European workers were evacuated.

RepRisk chief executive Philipp Aeby said: "Our aim is to raise awareness of potential ESG [environment, social and governance] risks and to encourage companies to systematically take into account such issues in their risk management strategies and processes."

Public Inquiry

Evidence hearings for the public inquiry into the Grenfell Tower fire will start on 21 May. At a procedural hearing yesterday (Wednesday) officials confirmed there was no evidence to suggest an electrical surge caused the fire.

Experts including Arup fire safety engineer leader Barbara Lane will submit reports on various aspects of the fire to the inquiry by the end of this month. There have also been calls to add a toxicology expert to the existing group.

Around 400,000 documents will be assessed as part of the inquiry.