



**ALL- PARTY PARLIAMENTARY FIRE SAFETY & RESCUE GROUP**

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Stephen Williams MP  
Minister for Communities  
Department for Communities and Local Government  
Eland House  
Bressenden Place  
LONDON  
SW1E 5DU

12th March 2014

Your Ref: ER/SW/003947/14

Dear Minister

**BUILDING REGULATIONS – APPROVED DOCUMENT B 2006 (FIRE SAFETY) VOLUME 1 (DWELLINGHOUSES)**

Thank you for your letter of the 26<sup>th</sup> February in response to my letter to the Rt. Hon Eric Pickles MP of the 7<sup>th</sup> February last.

You make it clear in your letter that the test of “cost effectiveness” is only one part of the Government’s regulatory policy, but I am sure you will agree that it has been the key factor featuring in every piece of correspondence received thus far from your colleague Ministers, as to the reason for not changing the guidance given in Approved Document B, in respect of installing automatic fire sprinklers in certain types of dwellings.

I am enclosing a random selection of letters from a number of Departmental Ministers, where costs of sprinklers are the principal argument for not installing them; in fact in the letter from the Secretary of State to Ann Jones AM of the Welsh Assembly Government the word ‘COST’ appears eight times in the first two paragraphs, and ten times in the letter of just over one page in length.

The All-Party Group finds it difficult to understand therefore why you continue to rely on, and quote research from 2007 when the same credible authors (BRE Global) updated and published new research in 2012, which concluded:

“Residential sprinklers as an additional safety measure are cost effective for:

- All residential care homes for elderly people, children and disabled people (including those with single bedrooms)
- Most blocks of purpose built flats and larger blocks of converted flats where costs are shared
- Traditional bedsit type HMO’s where there are at least six bedsit units per building and the costs are shared.”

You mention that the Secretary of State set out the Department’s intention to bring forward a formal review of the fire safety aspects of the regulations in his letter to Her Honour Frances Kirkham CBE, Assistant Deputy Coroner following the Lakanal House inquest; to include revisiting the question of residential sprinkler systems, and it is expected to lead to the publication of a new edition of the Approved Document in 2016/17.

Surely however when you already have credible evidence in 2012 to justify updating a small but important part of the guidance in the Approved Document, which will lead to saving of lives, you don’t need to wait another three years in addition to the two already spent since the research findings were updated, in order to take action? This would seem a relatively simple and small update to make, in order to reflect the latest research.

I assisted the legal team representing the families of the deceased at the Lakanal House inquest, and personally attended most of the fifty days of the Inquest, and I have extensively read the evidence since.

It seems astounding to me that although clarification was given by the Department at the inquest, that the composite panels under the external wall window sets of flats at Lakanal House were only required to be class “O” to comply with Building Regulations, and need not have had the fire resistance required under the former Section 20 London Building Acts; that this dangerous situation (allowing fire to spread externally into flat 79 within four and a half minutes) has still not been corrected in the Approved Document guidance .

As there are estimated to be another 4,000 older tower blocks in the UK, without automatic sprinkler protection, can we really afford to wait for another tragedy to occur before we amend this weakness?

The All-Party Group would be happy for two or three members to meet with you to constructively discuss these matters further, and to try and find the best way forward, in reaching an acceptable solution.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Kindest Regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ronnie King', with a stylized flourish at the end.

**Ronnie King OBE**  
**Honorary Administrative Secretary**