

# Hackitt Review will not ban combustibles or untested cladding

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The government will publish its post-Grenfell review into building regulations next week, with sources indicating it will not recommend a ban on combustible materials or the use of untested cladding systems, *Inside Housing* can exclusively reveal.



Judith Hackitt, leader of review of building regulations

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**The government's post-Grenfell building regulations review will not call for a ban on combustible materials #ukhousing**

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Dame Judith Hackitt's review will focus primarily on the construction industry, rather than the government or the regulatory system.

Multiple groups, including the Royal Institute of British Architects, the Housing Select Committee, and the Local Government Association (LGA), have [repeatedly called on Dame Hackitt](#) to recommend bans on combustible materials on tower blocks and on so-called 'desktop studies', which use information from previous tests on cladding systems to extrapolate results for untested systems.

The LGA has threatened to call for a new review immediately if such bans are not included in the report.

The Building Research Establishment, which chaired the review, has been accused of a "conflict of interest" over its role by [an insulation company](#) and [a fire science expert](#).

The company owns the only laboratory in the UK capable of carrying out official large-scale cladding tests and is paid for fire testing by foam insulation manufacturers.

There have been several calls for the testing regime to be overhauled and for a review of BS 8414, the standard that governs large-scale cladding tests.

Tests [commissioned by the Association of British Insurers](#) have suggested that BS 8414 is insufficiently realistic.

Lord Gary Porter, chair of the LGA, told *Inside Housing*: "It should be a bare minimum to have a ban on desktop studies, but ideally to rewrite the BS 8414 test to be more accurate to real-life conditions, and, until all that's resolved, a complete ban on any combustible materials on the external face of a high rise or complex building.

"If she doesn't deal with those things, we'll be calling on the government to start an immediate new review to take account of the knowledge we've got now."

A source understood to have been briefed on the report added: "It all seems to be about process rather than any particularly eye-catching changes to the building regulations themselves."

## WHAT ARE DESKTOP STUDIES, AND WHY ARE PEOPLE CONCERNED?

Building regulations say cladding systems which contain combustible insulation must be shown to meet specific standards based on “full scale test data”

A ‘desktop study’ is a means of making an assumption about whether or not a cladding system would meet these standards without actually testing it.

It involves using data from previous tests of the materials in different combinations to make assumptions about how it would perform in a test.

This is not specifically provided for in the current guide to building regulations, but the government believes they are loosely drafted to an extent which makes it permissible. It plans to redraft the guidance to include specific rules on the use of desktop studies for the first time.

The alternatives to a desktop study are full scale testing or not using combustible materials.

People are concerned about the process because it is based on assumption: at least one system cleared through a desktop study has failed a full scale test.

This is important for fire safety because mistakes may mean unsafe cladding systems being cleared for use on tall buildings.



Photo: Tom Pilston/Eyevine

Dame Judith Hackitt's (above) interim report on building safety, released in December 2017, was scathing about some of the industry's practices.

Although the full report is not due to be published until later this year, the former Health and Safety Executive chair has already highlighted a culture of cost-cutting and is likely to call for a radical overhaul of current regulations in an interim report.

**Dame Hackitt's key recommendations and conclusions include:**

- A call for the simplification of building regulations and guidelines to prevent misapplication
- Clarification of roles and responsibilities in the construction industry
- Giving those who commission, design and construct buildings primary responsibility that they are fit for purpose
- Greater scope for residents to raise concerns
- A formal accreditation system for anyone involved in fire prevention on high-rise blocks

- A stronger enforcement regime backed up with powerful sanctions

#### NEVER AGAIN CAMPAIGN



*Inside Housing* has launched a campaign to improve fire safety following the Grenfell Tower fire

#### **Never Again: campaign asks**

*Inside Housing* is calling for immediate action to implement the learning from the Lakanal House fire, and a commitment to act – without delay – on learning from the Grenfell Tower tragedy as it becomes available.

#### LANDLORDS

- Take immediate action to check cladding and external panels on tower blocks and take prompt, appropriate action to remedy any problems
- Update risk assessments using an appropriate, qualified expert.
- Commit to renewing assessments annually and after major repair or cladding work is carried out
- Review and update evacuation policies and ‘stay put’ advice in light of risk assessments, and communicate clearly to residents



## GOVERNMENT

- Provide urgent advice on the installation and upkeep of external insulation
- Update and clarify building regulations immediately – with a commitment to update if additional learning emerges at a later date from the Grenfell inquiry
- Fund the retrofitting of sprinkler systems in all tower blocks across the UK (except where there are specific structural reasons not to do so)

We will submit evidence from our research to the Grenfell public inquiry.

The inquiry should look at why opportunities to implement learning that could have prevented the fire were missed, in order to ensure similar opportunities are acted on in the future.

[READ MORE ABOUT THE CAMPAIGN HERE](#)