

Fire safety in the residential sector – the new landscape.

Wednesday 17th January 2018

The 2017 Grenfell Tower fire has shaken up the construction industry. The matter affects designers, specifiers, suppliers, contractors as well as clients, inspectors, regulatory bodies and facility managers. Understanding regulations and ensuring that they are fully and correctly applied is a must.

An inquiry into the tragic fire is underway and an independent review of building regulations and fire safety by Dame Judith Hackitt recently published. This well attended, thought provoking seminar was a timely opportunity to take stock of the current landscape, bring our understanding of the technical demand of fire safety up to date in the new context and hear from management in the residential sector about their response.

We heard from Stuart Power of Salus Approved Inspectors who brought us up to date and reflected on the current concerns, the complexity of various regulations relating to fire protection and the need for careful consideration in their interpretation. Nick Jenkins of Booth Muirie, cladding specialists who are advising the Government following the Grenfell fire, was able to explain the requirements for cladding systems and the potential combinations of materials and insulation products supported by feedback from the innumerable test which have been carried out. It was clear that considerable care needs to be taken in specifying materials and fire barriers. Finally, Emma Richman, speaking from her direct knowledge of managing homes as the Director of Assets at Great Places Housing Group, was able to talk about their response to ensure that their tenants remain safe. She particularly stressed the need to 'look behind the door' to ensure that the fire protection and escape strategy is supported and maintained when subject to internal maintenance or further installation works to ensure that it is not compromised.