

London police drag out Grenfell Tower fire investigation

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London's Metropolitan Police announced Monday that "around 80" people died in the Grenfell Tower fire. The police claim that the first part of their criminal investigation into the fire concluded that 350 people were resident in the block of flats on the night of June 13/14.

The Met said 255 people escaped from the fire that began in the early hours of the morning and that an additional 14 residents were not in their properties when the fire occurred. On this basis, they concluded that 81 people are likely to have died.

The figure contradicts estimates by others, including demographers, residents and those who lived nearby—with figures by demographers ranging from 90 plus to 123. The police say their figures are drawn from a number of records, including census figures. But many estimate that the number of people who resided in the block was nearer 500.

The statement by the police is an about-face on their previous insistence that it would take until the end of the year to identify those who had died—such was the devastation, with more than 15 tonnes of rubble and ash to sift through on each floor.

The estimated mortality figure was part of a broader announcement amounting to a declaration that the police investigation is designed to perpetuate a cover-up. The police made clear that their supposed investigation to determine who is responsible for the fire could take years.

The Met has interviewed 140 witnesses, but states that there are hundreds more to interview—including the nearly 1,000 firefighters and police officers who attended the fire scene. The 255 survivors will also be interviewed, plus local people who witnessed the fire. The Met said they had also seized data from 60 companies involved in the management, refurbishment

and construction of the tower—that was equivalent of 2 million boxes of A4 paper. Another 20 terabytes of CCTV footage—equivalent to 5,000 feature-length films—is also to be investigated.

This is nothing more than an attempt by the police to hide the truth in plain sight by burying the most relevant information in a mountain of entirely secondary data.

The fact is that fully one month after the fire, not a single person has been arrested or charged for what is the corporate manslaughter of at least 80 people.

Yes, 60 companies are being investigated and hundreds of people are being interviewed, but the main people responsible for making Grenfell Tower a death trap remain untouchable. These include the leading officials at Conservative-run Kensington and Chelsea Council, the Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation—who ran the block on behalf of the council—and the owners of the private companies who installed Grenfell's dangerous, flammable cladding, which emitted highly toxic fumes, Rydon and Harley Facades.

Then of course there are those who are "too big to jail" and who will never even be questioned by the Met, including ex-London Mayor Boris Johnson—who imposed huge fire service cuts, Prime Minister Theresa May and her predecessors, David Cameron, Gordon Brown and Tony Blair. These all presided over governments who carried out the mass gutting of safety regulations and imposed brutal cuts to vitally needed public services, including the fire brigade.

The police investigation has taken on so wide a scope in order to ensure no one faces timely prosecution. In apparent contrast, the governments' public inquiry has the narrowest possible remit, according to its Chairman Sir Martin Moore-Bick, of only establishing the "cause

of the fire and how it was able to spread so quickly to the whole of the building.”

This means that the politically guilty will face neither police investigation, nor questioning by May’s bogus inquiry.

There is already a vast amount of information in the public arena pointing to the corporate and government criminality that led to a small blaze in a fourth floor flat engulfing the entire building within minutes.

On Friday, the BBC’s *Newsnight* revealed that the London Fire Brigade, under-resourced and undermanned after years of savage cuts, was disastrously unprepared for the June 14 fire.

Based on the London Fire Brigade’s official log of the incident and the testimony of firefighters, speaking anonymously, *Newsnight* reported that essential equipment was either lacking altogether or did not arrive before the fire turned into an inferno destroying the entire 24-storey structure. Fire crews also told *Newsnight* that there were major problems with low water pressure and radio communication problems.

Two fire engines were dispatched from North Kensington fire station at 12.59 and were on the scene in four minutes. They were joined by two more fire engines, from Kensington and Hammersmith stations “shortly after.” But the equipment available to these firefighters proved woefully inadequate. Having entered the building to put out the fire on the fourth floor, firefighters were perplexed by radio communications that instructed them more fire engines would be needed. Reporter John Sweeney narrated that at first firefighters heard, “It’s a four-pump fire. That means four fire engines. Then it’s a 10-pump fire. That’s bad. Then it’s a 20-pump fire. That’s a catastrophe. And they don’t get it because they are on top of their fire [in the flat’s kitchen].” Sweeney adds, “And then they realise, the fire is growing on the outside.”

The rapid spread of the fire was due to Grenfell Tower being clad in flammable material—installed last year as the cheapest option in a “refurbishment”. *Newsnight* showed some of the mobile phone footage shot by a nearby resident, Jake Patton. The footage, which begins at 1.12am and lasts five minutes, shows firefighters on the ground outside of the building desperately trying to put out a growing blaze with a hosepipe that barely reaches the fourth floor. By the

end of Patton’s footage, the fire has already taken hold of several higher floors.

The logs obtained by *Newsnight* reveal that a 30-metre (100ft) tower known as an “aerial”, which could reach the 10th floor of Grenfell Tower, was not dispatched until 1:19am. It finally arrived at 1.32am. This was 24 minutes after the first crews were sent to fight the fire, by which time the blaze was out of control—inside and outside the building—with the aerial making no difference.

It wasn’t until hours later that a 67-metre-high aerial tower was dispatched all the way from Surrey, as the London Fire Brigade—tasked with protecting a metropolitan population of 13.7 million people—does not have such critical equipment.

Firefighters had to work under conditions in which the stairwells, which are supposed to be smoke-free in a tower block, were filled with dense, toxic fumes, leaving many unable to see. On top of this, firefighters’ radio communications did not function properly or at all beyond 10 storeys high—a problem compounded by the fact that so much information was being relayed. Sweeney commented that not only were firefighters “fighting blind, they were fighting deaf.”

Water pressure problems seriously hampered their efforts. One firefighter said, “The fire floors we went in were helmet-meltingly hot... when we were clearing flats, it was a case of a quick look and closing doors because the water pressure wasn’t up to firefighting.”

Firefighters did not have enough of the “extended duration” breathing apparatus required—particularly when operating in the higher floors of Grenfell.

Newsnight revealed that the policy of the London Fire Brigade was not to send tall ladders to residential tower blocks’ fires. Such a decision can only be the result of years of budget cuts and a callous disregard by the central government and local authorities for the working-class population.



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