

Thousands of new buildings found unsafe as UK flammable cladding crisis worsens

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If anything confirms the fact that Britain’s ruling elite, as with their counterparts internationally, could not care less about the safety and lives of millions of working-class people, it is the Grenfell Tower inferno.

Not only have the seven-year-long police investigation and a now completed public inquiry resulted in precisely zero arrests or prosecutions for the deaths of 72 people in June 2017, but hundreds of thousands of people are still living in tower blocks covered in the same flammable cladding that caused those deaths.

The financial resources allocated for remedial action are vastly below what is required to make thousands of buildings safe. Since the Grenfell fire, just £2.3 billion had been spent by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) on the remediation of buildings with unsafe cladding as of August 2024.

In September, in the first release of data since the Grenfell Inquiry, MHCLG reported that no work has been done on more than half (2,400) of the 4,770 high-rise and mid-rise buildings in England designated as having “life-critical” cladding or fire safety defects since 2017. Only 29 percent of works have been fully completed, while 21 percent more remained unfinished and unsafe.

Of the mid-rise buildings over 11 metres tall, work on nearly all (98 percent) still has not begun. On high-rise buildings over 18 metres with Grenfell-style ACM cladding, remediation work had not started on 3 percent. On high-rise buildings with other types of dangerous cladding, work had not begun on 36 percent.

The problem was actually getting worse each month, with more buildings identified as needing remediation than were being fixed. Some 42 remediations were completed and another 78 begun between the end of

July to the end of August. But another 141 buildings had been found during the same time.

Earlier this month, the National Audit Office (NAO) revealed that it could cost up to £22.4 billion to make England’s multistorey residential buildings safe from dangerous cladding. That is the higher-end estimation, but even the NAO’s lower end estimation is a staggering £12.6 billion.

This contrasts sharply with overall funding by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) which agreed to provide £9.1 billion to fund upfront costs. The Labour government plans to reduce these costs to the taxpayer to £5.1 billion through a levy—first announced by the Conservative government in February 2021—on the property sector.

Yet as the NAO points out, all of this remains essentially a pipe dream, as it is unclear how much the levy can even generate—on top of the fact that builders won’t even start paying it until autumn 2025 at the earliest.

With police saying they need another two years before even considering charges for the crimes at Grenfell, the date for completion of remedial work on buildings more than 11 metres tall is set more than a decade into the future, the year 2035, fully 18 years after Grenfell. But the NAO warned in its findings: “Remediation of buildings over 11 metres is not currently on course to complete by 2035 and there are significant challenges to overcome.”

Even worse: “Of the 9,000 to 12,000 buildings over 11 metres that MHCLG estimates will need remediating, 4,771 buildings have been identified and included in its portfolio, leaving up to 60% of affected buildings still to be identified. Of those identified, remediation work has yet to start on half and has

completed on around a third. Of all the buildings that may be in scope, work has completed on only 12–16%.”

The government responded to the NAO by stating that “the pace of remediation to make homes safe has been far too slow” and that this would be addressed in its “Remediation Acceleration plan.” The plan, announced by Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner in September, was not accelerated fast enough to be available by the time of the NAO report.

This is criminal delay. According to the NAO, there are an estimated 258,000 people living in the 4,771 buildings over 11 metres requiring urgent remediation.

Even that figure is an underestimation. Analysis by the *i* newspaper published in September concluded, “More than a million people could be living in potentially unsafe properties seven years after the Grenfell fire,” with housing correspondent Vicky Spratt explaining, “the analysis suggests more than double the number of residents could be affected by dangerous cladding than previously thought.

“This is because the latest official data does not include thousands of properties yet to be fully assessed. The Government statistics also exclude hundreds of thousands of people living in flats less than 11 metres tall that face a possible fire risk.”

Sprat continued, “At present, the official number of flats in social and private residential blocks which have unsafe cladding is 256,000. However, campaigners believe this could rise to about 600,000 because many buildings are yet to be properly assessed. The average dwelling has two residents—meaning more than a million people could be living in dangerous properties.”

Fears have only been heightened by recent tower block fires, like the one this summer in Barking and Dagenham in which flammable cladding again played a role.

The crisis has also left thousands of residents in massive debt and unable to sell homes that are designated as dangerous but have not been fixed. An example was provided in a *Channel 4 News* expose.

Leaseholder Racheal Loftus from the Leeds docks neighbourhood is still waiting for the freeholder to make her building safe four years after problems were identified. Holding a piece of the wall’s insulation that had been sawn off as a test, she said, “I couldn’t believe that this was all it was made of.” The presence

of the flammable insulation material was a major safety issue, “As you can see, it’s used to let light in, but actually what we’re told that if it did catch fire, the likelihood that it would melt would actually be problematic because this is our main exit route in case of fire.”

When asked if she could sell her property, Racheal observed it was now “valued at zero pounds until the work is done, but I have to continue paying my mortgage. Everybody in this building is stuck until they decide to act.” Temporary fixes have already cost her £20,000, with Racheal saying she and other first time buyers “are stuck living in this nightmare constantly.”

There are billions to spend on war, with armed forces top brass now insisting that the election of Donald Trump as US President means far more must be squandered on the military. Conservative and Labour governments have backed the NATO war against Russia in Ukraine to the tune of more than £12 billion already—an amount that would have met the National Audit Office’s lower-end estimate for all the critical remedial work on buildings above 11 metres.

The fight for decent, safe and affordable housing cannot be left in the hands of a money-mad and war-crazed ruling class, and its parties Labour and Tory. Housing is a social right which can only be secured today as part of the fight for socialism.



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