



PRESS RELEASE

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Government Reassures Public on Fire Safety in Government Estates

Her Majesty's Government of Gibraltar wishes to reassure the public of the safety of its dwellings and particularly the newly refurbished buildings, including the high rise blocks in Glacis Estate.

The Government is confident that the refurbishment and the cladding of buildings have been undertaken to the highest of standards. Following the tragic events caused by the blaze in Grenfell Tower in West London in the early hours of Wednesday, the Minister for Housing yesterday requested a complete fire safety review of the high rise buildings of the Government's Housing Stock. Although there has not yet been a full investigation of the Grenfell Towers fire, several major points of difference should be noted:

- The Government's contractors, GJBS, have confirmed that the cladding systems used in Grenfell Tower was completely different to that used in Gibraltar. The Grenfell Tower cladding system consisted of aluminium composite panels whereas the system used in the Government of Gibraltar Estates is an insulated render system.
- In Grenfell Towers the panels were fitted to wooden frames: the Gibraltar system uses metal frames.
- The cladding product in London is manufactured by Reynobond; Gibraltar's product is made by Weber.
- GJBS have also confirmed that when considering the application and the design of the cladding throughout the refurbished housing estates, fire risk issues were a paramount consideration. The Weber system uses accredited and approved materials for this type of use and the design was developed in direct consultation with the manufacturers of the insulation system and was applied using their latest approved technical guidelines, which include a system of fire breaks, both horizontal and vertical, to ensure that any potential fire does not spread in an uncontrolled manner through the building.
- The technical advice to HM Government of Gibraltar as regards the behaviour of the materials used in a fire situation is that the external surfaces of the system is classified as Class 0 or 'low risk' as defined in the documents supporting the national Building Regulations.
- These matters were at the same time discussed with and approved and certified with the Gibraltar Fire and Rescue Service. In addition, in the context of its review of Standard Operating Procedures, two weeks ago the Gibraltar Fire and Rescue Service undertook routine operational training for High Rise Incidents.



- Additionally, in keeping with current fire safety regulations, dry risers were tested at both Glacis Tower Blocks and certified to British Standards in March 2017.

Since Gibraltar's estates were refurbished, there have been three recent incidents of fire - none of which spread past their immediate areas or caused any significant damage to external cladding. One was a substantial fire inside a flat in Laguna Estate, where the flames reached the external fabric of the building and only stained the external finish: there was no damage or propagation of fire upon contact of the external cladding. There was an external fire in Glacis Estate where, despite the flames reaching the second floor, again there was no damage other than staining. There was a final incident where a cigarette had been thrown from a window in Referendum House and fell on clothes hanging in the drying baskets, resulting in a fire. The damage was once again only cosmetic and there was no spread of fire. These incidents confirm that the quality of the materials used, the manner in which these are installed, and the design of the cladding is entirely safe.

The Chief Minister, the Hon Fabian Picardo MP QC, said: "Late yesterday, I convened all relevant parties through the Minister for Housing and I sought all essential information. We then met today at No6 to consider all emerging information that might be significant. The public can rest assured that the refurbishment works on the estates have been reviewed already in the light of the tragic events at Grenfell Tower. I am satisfied that our professionals at the Housing Works Agency, GJBS and Gibraltar Fire and Rescue Services are on top of the issues and have been informed of all matters arising from the incident in London. I am sure tenants will find this very reassuring. The condolences of the people and Government of Gibraltar go to all those who have lost friends or family in this terrible tragedy."

Minister for Housing, the Hon Samantha Sacramento MP, said: "Upon hearing the news of the terrible incident in London, I spoke yesterday to the Principal Housing Officer and commissioned a working group of all relevant professionals to ensure that the safety of all our blocks are maintained to the highest standards. We will continue that work as the UK inquiry carries out its work."

The Housing Department reminds tenants that they are not permitted to have any items in the communal areas as this is a breach of the tenancy agreement and constitutes a serious fire risk. The Department has written to all tenants asking that items be removed within 14 days, failing which items will be removed.