

External Cladding Inspections



Introduction

Non-loadbearing external cladding systems have for many years been used to increase the thermal performance of multi-storey residential tower blocks and hence the buildings lifespan. Increasingly, these systems are being used in new build with the cladding systems being fixed to and supported by a light steel frame and a wide range of design solutions and materials are currently available.

The risk of fire spread in multi-storey buildings is an issue of concern, and recent fires have continued to highlight this. External cladding systems have the potential to quickly spread fire through a multi-storey building causing potential loss of life and extensive property damage.

General Testing / Inspection Strategy

It is generally the case that where metallic / non-metallic cladding has been identified on high rise buildings, the cladding system has never been tested to confirm whether the materials are non-combustible. It is important therefore, that the testing and inspections concentrate on the entire cladding system and not just the external material. The cladding system may be made up of a metallic skin with a substrate and insulation attached, or there may be layers of insulation or other materials behind the cladding.

Testing in isolation often has limited value and therefore, we would propose a strategy where we check the compartmentation and fire stopping behind the cladding as this may mitigate the results of the testing.

To complete this work effectively, we would require one of your competent contractors with appropriate access equipment to remove panels for testing (this is destructive so the relevant panels will need to be replaced) and also to remove specific sections of cladding so we can review the compartmentation behind (and replace afterwards). This would need careful planning.

(Note: we will not instruct contractors as to the methodology to be used to actually remove the cladding; we will just identify the areas which require removal).

Services

We are, therefore, able to offer the following services:

- To carry out site inspections by fire engineers to identify areas for cladding testing.
- To carry out site inspections by fire engineers to identify the areas of the cladding system requiring inspection (including the external cladding, insulation and supporting structure including cavity barriers).
- To arrange for cladding samples to be tested by an independent testing company [ISO 1716 (class A2) – this the appropriate standard for a building > 18m].
- To carry out site inspections by fire engineers to inspect the cladding system.

A comprehensive report would be produced to confirm our findings and related advice.



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