



Cladding advice



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Since the Grenfell Tower fire MHCLG have released 22 different Advice Notes, initially providing building owners with results and advice around the post-Grenfell large scale testing and then later providing 'instruction' on what investigation works building owners should be carrying out. Initially this was a straight forward review of whether or not there were ACM (Aluminium Composite Material) panels on any buildings with a floor over 18m above ground floor level, but as more advice notes have been released this has become a complete assessment of all buildings, regardless of height, to establish if there are any combustible materials in the external wall build up that could contribute to external fire spread.

As the MHCLG Advice Notes are by their very name advice, there was no requirement for the advice notes to be followed. However, it did not take long for mortgage providers and insurers to start requiring confirmation, from a suitably qualified person, that buildings meet the criteria as outlined within the MHCLG advice notes, most commonly Advice Note 14 (Advice for building owners: external wall systems that do not incorporate ACM). Failing the provision of this information, properties started to become 'zero-valued' and residents were not able to sell their flats.

Since the 'requirement' introduced by mortgage providers and insurers, the industry has had to react by firstly trawling through the as-built building information to determine the exact products used in the construction, where possible, with further site investigation required to hopefully confirm the correct products were installed. Often the as built information is not available, especially on buildings over 10 years

old, so product identification relies solely on the site investigation. This can often result in samples being taken and sent for testing to determine their combustibility.

Many buildings have interim measures in place, such as a waking watch, which will remain until either the building is confirmed as complying with the Advice Notes, or any necessary remedial works have taken place. The investigation process alone can take several months, and if remedial works are required this can take another 2-3 years once the full design and construction process is completed.

At Robson Frankham we work with many of our clients, from developers to large housing associations, in reviewing their building stock to determine if they comply with the relevant advice notes. We work closely with their contractors to carry out the site surveys and ensure that we gain enough information to either offer assurance of compliance to the advice notes, or we will assist in the removal and testing process to establish the necessary route forward.

When we assess buildings that already have interim measures in place, which could remain there for a significant period of time, we would always look to reduce the cost impact of this without jeopardising resident safety. For example, the installation of a suitable fire detection and alarm system can alleviate the need for a full waking watch and provide an enhanced level of fire safety. Whilst the initial cost of installing these types of systems isn't cheap, it doesn't take long for the cost to be recovered in the savings made by not having a full waking watch.