David Sterling
Head of the Civil Service
Room FD.34, Stormont Castle
Stormont Estate, Belfast
BT4 3TT, Northern Ireland
Tel: 028 9037 8133
E-mail: hocs@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk

HCS-099-17

By email only

3 July 2017

To who it may concern,

SAFETY CHECKS ON CLADDING SYSTEMS ON HIGH RISE BUILDINGS

This letter is intended for owners, landlords and managers of private residential blocks in Northern Ireland. Representatives for the private residential sector have kindly agreed to disseminate this letter, and we are grateful for their assistance.

Following the horrific fire at Grenfell Tower in North Kensington, we want to ensure that all those who have responsibility for high rise accommodation in Northern Ireland are aware of help that is available in checking your buildings. This is in addition to action already in hand to check social housing accommodation and other accommodation used or owned by public sector bodies. For the purposes of this note a high rise building is one that is higher than six storeys or 18 metres high.

You will be aware that there has been much public concern and comment about potential flaws in the cladding that was on Grenfell Tower. While the exact reasons for the speed and spread of the fire have yet to be determined, the UK Government has concluded that there are additional tests that can be undertaken with regard to a particular type of cladding made of Aluminium Composite Material (ACM) used on high rise buildings. This testing facility is also being made available to the owners or managing agents of high rise buildings in Northern Ireland and we have arranged for testing of this cladding to be carried out at the Buildings Research Establishment (BRE). The government will meet the costs of conducting such tests on any sample cladding materials identified and provided by building owners or managing agents. The offer is for the initial testing only. The costs of any remedial action will be the responsibility of the owner of the building.

Details on how to identify ACM cladding are in Annex A. It is important to stress that ACM cladding is not of itself dangerous**,** but it is important that the right type is used. If you identify that cladding on any of your buildings is made of ACM, then a sample can be tested. The procedures for taking up this offer of testing, are set out in the Annex.

Where the entire block is not owned and managed by the same party, please ensure that only one sample is provided and that any necessary permissions are obtained for taking and sending off the sample. We would not expect individual leaseholders within a building to send off samples for testing.

As well as this work it is of course important that owners / landlords have robust fire assessments for their properties. The Local Government Association's *Fire safety in purpose-built blocks of flats* remains the most comprehensive guidance on ensuring fire safety in these types of buildings[1].

Thank you for your cooperation in this important work.

If you have any queries please contact us at housingstrategy.coordinationbranch@communities-ni.gov.uk

DAVID STERLING
Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service

[1] https://www.local.gov.uk/fire-safety-purpose-built-flats

Annex A – Protocol for Sampling of Aluminium Composite Material Cladding Identification of Aluminium Composite Material Cladding

Aluminium Composite Material (ACM) is a type of flat panel that consists of two thin aluminium sheets bonded to a non-aluminium core, typically between 3 and 7mm thick. The panels can have a painted or metallic finish (eg copper or zinc effects). It can be differentiated from solid aluminium sheet by looking at a cut edge whereby the lamination is visible. It may be necessary to cut a hole in a panel if a cut edge is not readily accessible.

On buildings with a floor over 18m above ground level, where ACM panels are identified, it is necessary to establish whether the panels are of a type that complies with the Building Regulations guidance: i.e. the core material should be a material of limited combustibility or Class A2.[2]

Testing of ACM

To allow for the identification of core materials, a Government-funded testing capacity will allow a small sample of the cladding to be tested and its type identified. If you wish to take up this offer, then you will need to submit samples for testing.

Where the surveyor undertaking assessment of a composite panel determines that it is necessary for cladding to be subjected to testing they should follow this procedure:

1. Cut out two samples of at least 250x250mm in size from each location sampled. Take photographs as necessary to identify the location of the sample. You should take samples from above and below 18m above ground level as appropriate and check different multiple panels where you have concern that material specification varies.

2. Using an indelible ink pen, note the building name / number, postcode and a unique identifier (i.e. name of building owner followed by unique sample number e.g. ABC/001) traceable to the specific location within the building of each sample. Add a direct dial telephone or mobile contact number to be used in the event that there are any queries on the sample.

3. You must make good by closing the hole using a non-combustible sheet such as steel fixed with self-tapping screws or rivets.

4. Complete the data return form attached to this letter and include a hard copy of it with the sample. You should provide as much information as is readily available, but not if this will delay submission of samples for testing.

[2] Material of limited combustibility' is as described in paragraphs 1.9 and 1.10 of Technical Booklet E (Fire safety) October 2012 and includes materials of Class A2-s3, d2 or better in accordance with BS EN 13501-1.

5. Place one of the samples from each location in a padded envelope with a copy of the data return form (attached below). Clearly mark the envelope URGENT – CLADDING TEST SAMPLE.

6. Send the test samples by recorded delivery or courier to:

BRE
Bucknalls Lane
Garston
Watford
Herts,
WD25 9XX

For any testing related queries please email material.screening@bre.co.uk
7. Retain the second sample from each location for your own records or for testing in the event that samples are lost or misplaced in transit.

FORM TO BE USED FOR PRIVATE RESIDENTIAL PROPERTY

Please provide the following:

Section 1 – Building information

	DETAILS
Building Address inc Post Code:	
Building owner:	
Building owner address:	
Building owner telephone contact and number:	
Checks undertaken post 14 June	

Section 2 – Cladding and Assessment checklist summary

Property confirmed six storeys or more or 18m or higher	
Property clad in Aluminium type panels	

Section 3 – Cladding checking

Panel identified as possible ACM	
ACM confirmed to be class A2 or of limited combustibility	
Testing samples obtained and submitted	
Date testing sample obtained	

Section 4 – Additional building data

DETAILS	
Tenure	
Number of units	
Number of storeys	