

Flammable Grenfell material remains at Queen Elizabeth University Hospital



Flammable Grenfell material remains at Scotland's superhospital



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Ministers have come under fire after controversial materials used in Grenfell Tower remain on the nation's super-hospital remain in place a year-and-a-half after it was passed safe after the horrifying blaze that claimed the lives of 72 people.

Scottish Government officials have been forced to apologise after stating that Scotland's biggest health authority was to remove insulation material at the 197ft-high Queen Elizabeth University Hospital five years after the blaze.

NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde (NHSGGC) is currently reviewing the use of the Kingspan Kooltherm K15 insulation on the building but said it had made no decision on its removal.

In December, 2020, it was revealed that while NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde insisted the material used at the 197ft-high Glasgow hospital, it had applied to have it removed in 2017 but did not pursue the move.

And it continued to insist that it would not consider removing the Kingspan Kooltherm K15 insulation which remains in the wake of the Grenfell disaster of June, 2017.

This was despite evidence provided to the Grenfell inquiry that Irish group Kingspan marketed its K15 insulation with fire test certificates which did not represent the product being sold.

The Scottish Tenants Organisation (STO) has raised concerns that no action has been taken to remove the materials, after being told in a letter by Scottish Government officials that it was.

Retired Scots architect Robert Menzies who was involved in designs for the new children's hospitals in both Glasgow and for Edinburgh had questioned the legality of its use on a building over 18m in height.

He said the original fire rating of K15 "fails on all levels and at all heights" and should never have been installed on any part of the hospital facade in the first place.

K15 has never been replaced at the hospital after NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde said five years ago that Multiplex, the main contractor for the construction provided assurances the material was properly installed and met "Scotland's stringent building and fire safety regulations".

In December, 2020, the health board said the hospital was "one of the safest buildings in UK in terms of fire engineering".

The Scottish Government also said it had been assured the insulation on the hospital which officially opened in July, 2015 was fitted correctly and met fire regulations.

But the Scottish Government in response to calls to remove K15, wrongly confirmed that action is now being taken to remove external panels.

A letter from the directorate for health finance, corporate governance and value, responding to concerns about K15 confirmed that NHSGGC had appointed advisors to re-examine the materials used on the external walls of the hospital.

Through that process it was established that the insulation in some areas "does not meet latest building regulations".

The letter continued: "NHSGGC are in the process of commissioning work to replace these panels.



"NHSGGC have also instructed independent fire engineers to undertake a fire risk appraisal in accordance with newly published guidance and this will inform an assessment of any further mitigations required."

Officials said further inquiries about the insulation material were made as a result of the Grenfell Inquiry as they considered the legal implications while commissioning an independent review of all available contemporary data.

But NHSGGC said the Kingspan insulation was installed at the QEUH in accordance with stringent building regulations and "at this time, there are no new requirements" that necessitate its replacement.

The health board added: "We will, as a matter of course, ensure that we are responsive to the outcome of the Kingspan investigation and any implications for the hospital.

"The hospital is designed and equipped to the highest standards for fire safety. It has heat and smoke fire alarm systems combined with automatic fire suppression sprinkler systems fitted in all areas, is equipped with designated fire-fighting apparatus and has fire evacuation lifts."

It added: "We can confirm that we have commissioned a further review of the materials used on the external walls in light of recent evidence and information from the Grenfell Inquiry, which is relevant to construction projects UK-wide. This work is underway.

"Effective mitigation measures and a comprehensive fire safety strategy are in place to ensure the ongoing safety of the hospital. NHSGGC has been working with Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, Scottish Government and Glasgow City Council Building Standards advisors who have confirmed they are content with the immediate mitigation measures."

Alan Morrison, deputy director of health infrastructure at the Scottish Government then apologised.

"I would like to clarify, in particular the final sentence which states that NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde are in the process of replacing external panels which is not what is happening. This was a reference to the removal of internal wall panels, which has previously been put in the public domain by the health board, and not external panels. I apologise for any confusion caused by our original response."

The STO said: "Having written to the Scottish Government in great detail about the need to replace the dangerous combustible Kingspan Kooltherm K15 external wall insulation on the Queen Elizabeth University Hospital in Glasgow with it also having been on Grenfell we received a reply that indeed the health board would remove this flammable external insulation from the hospital only to discover that this was a farcical reply and that they were in fact removing internal wall panels in the atrium of the hospital. we received a belated apology for this serious error."

"The Scottish Government then compounded their error by failing to address concerns regarding the mounting evidence that K15 external insulation should be removed from the hospital to be replaced by non combustible external insulation to ensure the life safety of all patients and staff."

It comes three years after the health board was placed in "special measures" after it was accused of covering up the death of two children at the hospital.

The entire board had been placed at stage four of Scotland's five-stage NHS performance scale, meaning there are "significant risks to delivery, quality, financial performance or safety".

The NHSGCC remains in level two of the framework, where there is increased surveillance and monitoring by the Scottish Government.

The Scottish Tenants Organisation which has said it was "shocking" health board management had delayed for so long on the issues welcomed the move. They said it justifies the concerns that were raised over the insulation material which were the result of denials from the health authority while, the group suffered what it described as "vile and unfair attacks on social media for scaremongering".

K15 was one of two types of insulation used on Grenfell that turned out to be combustible.

Kingspan has denied wrongdoing and said it did not know its material was being used on Grenfell.

Government officials responsible for fire safety in buildings became aware of the use of

combustible insulation being used as part of cladding systems on high-rise blocks as far back as 2014, with K15 identified as the principal product, the Grenfell inquiry was told.

Kingspan technical manager Philip Heath admitted in evidence to the inquiry that "with hindsight" it should have withdrawn K15 from the market as a product suitable for use on buildings above 18m after a revised version of the product dramatically failed a 2007 Building Research Establishment fire test.

In October, this year, it was confirmed that test certificates for K15 from the 2005 tests had been withdrawn.

According to Kingspan's own literature from four years ago, its K15 material including pipe insulation covering at least 166,000 square foot of the hospital.

It states that the hospital's unusual design "created additional challenges" for specialist contractors who discussed how K15 "helped them to meet requirements".

The contractor said: "The shape of the building with many curves, angles and land locked areas made the need for lightweight, flexible and robust material imperative. Kingspan Kooltherm K15 Rainscreen Board provided the necessary thermal performance, ease of site installation and, most importantly, resilience to the West of Scotland weather until such time the overcladding was completed."

It was installed on a range of façade systems on the external walls of the hospital.

According to Kingspan: "Insulating the building with Kingspan Kooltherm provided the necessary thermal performance needed to assist in the award of credits in the Energy section of the BREEAM assessment."

BREEAM is the Building Research Establishment (BRE) Environmental Assessment Method, first launched in the UK in 1990 and sets best practice standards for the environmental performance of buildings through design, specification, construction and operation.



In August, 2017, it emerged that fire safety audits within the Queen Elizabeth University Hospital, were found to be satisfactory.

But further discussion led the health board to remove sections of unidentified (Aluminium Composite Material) cladding similar to what was found at Grenfell was found on parts of the hospital as a "precautionary" measure.

Then health secretary Shona Robison said she was "reassured" by the move.

But the Ministerial Working Group on Building and Fire Safety was advised that K15 "is classified as an acceptable product under our building regulations and that it has been appropriately installed to ensure it met building and fire safety regulations".

Sean Clerkin, Scottish Tenants' Organisation campaign co-ordinator said: "The farce of the Scottish Government informing by email that the health board would remove dangerous external insulation panels from the Queen Elizabeth Hospital and then forced to apologise because the panels that are actually being removed are internal panels in the atrium of the buildings is a statement of the ridiculous.

There has to be an immediate resolution to this state of affairs with the authorities stepping up to remove this highly flammable K15 insulation from the Queen Elizabeth University Hospital ensuring the safety of all people by replacing it with non combustible insulation "It is as though the Scottish Government don't take seriously the concerns of campaigners.

Last month it emerged that ministers had spent less than £250,000 on dealing with 'dangerous' cladding across Scotland five years after the Grenfell tragedy.

It has been confirmed that as of the end of May, just £241,000 of a £97.1m cladding fund provided to the Scottish Government has been spent in the wake of the horrific blaze.

More than 400 mainly public buildings in Scotland including high-rises and schools have the potentially deadly material. Around one in eight blocks of flats, mainly overseen by local authorities, and one in 10 local authority schools have the combustible material.

Thousands more flat-owners in Scotland are also estimated to have had their privately owned homes rendered worthless because they are wrapped in flammable materials.

Kingspan said: "We did not make the exterior cladding on Grenfell Tower. The inquiry itself has stated that "the principal reason" for rapid fire spread on Grenfell was the polyethylene cored ACM cladding used on the exterior of the building. No facade system using this PE ACM cladding, regardless of the insulation used, would have passed the necessary large-scale system fire test. Our K15 insulation board was misused in this unsafe and non-compliant system."