HIGH RISE INVENTORY: Q&A

GENERAL

Q. Why has the High-Rise Inventory been developed?

A. The Ministerial Working Group on Building and Fire Safety was established in 2017 to oversee a review of building and fire safety regulatory frameworks, and any other relevant matters, to help ensure that people are safe in Scotland's buildings, and make any recommendations for improvement as required.

As part of the Working Group's work plan, the development of a central source of information on key aspects of the construction and fire safety features of high rise domestic blocks was agreed.

The High Rise Inventory looks to establish as far as possible a detailed picture of Scotland's domestic high rise stock, and help to ensure fire safety through identification of a building's construction and fire safety characteristics.

Q. Who has provided the information in the inventory, and what checks have been carried out on the data?

A. The inventory has been completed by Local Authority Building Standards departments for all relevant buildings within their Local Authority area, to the best of their knowledge at time of completion. Data has been provided by Local Authority Building Standards departments through interrogation of building warrant records. Local Authority housing departments and Registered Social Landlords have also provided information, with data checks also undertaken by Local Authority Building Standards departments.

The 2020 collection is the first iteration of the inventory. It is a significant undertaking, and given its scale and scope, and the challenges of this first data collection, it can be expected that processes will be refined and improved for future exercises.

Q. How will the inventory be updated?

A. The inventory data gathering exercise is to be an annual undertaking. Given its scale and scope it can be expected that future exercises are likely to be less intensive, requiring amendments to reflect the changes that may have been made to buildings throughout the year rather than the more extensive data sourcing required for the initial exercise.

There will be an iterative process of improvement while questions are considered and improved where necessary for future data collections.

An update providing information on Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) operational assurance visits shall be provided in Spring 2020 (see question below).

Q. Why are there some gaps in the Inventory where completion rates for questions are not 100% and data is unknown?

A. This first HRI exercise has required a significant and intensive data collection undertaking. While there is a small proportion of unknown data in the inventory, it is intended that this shall be minimised in future exercises, and this shall be followed up as appropriate. Some information may simply not be available due to e.g. redaction of building warrant information from paper files of a significant age.

It should also be noted that data on the estimated lifespan of a building is not included in Building Warrant applications. Feedback received through the data collection indicated that this is subjective and sometimes challenging data to provide. Amendment of this question shall be included in questions for future inventory data collections.

Q. The summary report refers to operational assurance visits by SFRS. When will information on these visits be provided?

A. Relevant buildings have now been confirmed through the 2020 data collection. Engagement has taken place with SFRS throughout the data collection exercise and it is expected that information on operational assurance visits (see questions 4.4 and 4.4.1 of questionnaire) will be provided in Spring 2020.

DATA COLLECTION

Q. A proportion of buildings without fire doors fitted to flat entrances and escape stairs are reported in the HRI. What does this mean for resident safety and what has been done to address this?

A. For those buildings where it is reported that fire doors have not been fitted to flat entrances (36 buildings) and escape stairs (59 buildings), follow-up is being undertaken to enquire why this is the case and what actions are being taken. SFRS has also been made aware. The requirements for fire doors have changed over time as technology and fire performance have improved. It is important to note that any older door when closed will provide a degree of resistance to fire. Many of these older doors may have performed satisfactorily in a fire situation and are likely to continue to do so, providing they remain in good condition and are effectively self-closing from any angle.

Current Building Standards (applicable from 2005) guidance 2.2 (separation), 2.9 (escape) and 2.14 (fire and rescue service facilities) requires that 60 minute fire resisting self-closing doors are fitted to escape stairs and flat entrances in high rise domestic buildings. Prior to 2005 the requirement was for 30 minute doors in the same locations.

The challenge is to understand what fire resistance the door provides. All relevant factors in carrying out a risk assessment of fire doors should be considered (see https://www.gov.scot/publications/practical-fire-safety-guidance-existing-high-rise-domestic-buildings/ for advice on fire resisting doors).

Q. A proportion of buildings with insulation materials exposed in the external wall cavity are reported in the HRI. What does this mean?
A. The inventory reports 231 buildings with insulation materials exposed in the external wall cavity. Exposed in the external wall cavity does not mean that the insulation material is exposed directly on the outside of the wall to the external environment.

Building standards require the installation of fire resisting cavity barriers and / or fire-stopping behind the external wall cladding, which are designed to inhibit fire growth should the fire spread into the cavity.

ALUMINIUM COMPOSITE MATERIAL (ACM)

Q. What is aluminium composite material (ACM)?
A. ACM is a generic name for a type of flat panel that consists of two thin aluminium sheets held together with core filler. The panels are much lighter than solid aluminium panels of the same dimensions and, from a weather protection perspective, meet the same levels of performance. The panels can have a painted or metallic finish (e.g. copper or zinc effects).

ACM panels come in three basic types. The difference is the type of "filler material" that makes up the core. It can be difficult to tell what type of ACM is fitted as they can look the same when they are on a building. The three types of filler material are:

- Unmodified polyethylene (PE) – little or no inherent resistance to fire
- Fire retardant polyethylene (FR) – some resistance to fire
- Limited combustibility (A2) classification when tested in accordance with European Standards - no contribution to fire growth.

Q. Polyethylene type Aluminium Composite Material panels (ACM-PE) is identified in the summary report as present on 23 buildings. What does this mean for resident safety?
A. Returns submitted to the inventory report ACM-PE (little or no inherent resistance to fire) as present on 23 buildings. Through engagement with Local Authority Building Standards departments, the Scottish Government are aware of two high rise domestic buildings extensively clad with ACM-PE of the same type as that found on Grenfell Tower (see below). The remainder reported only partial ACM-PE in isolated sections and should be assessed on a case by case basis as part the fire risk assessment for the building.

Changes to building standards on 1 May 2005 mean that ACM-PE is not to be installed on high rise buildings where the application for the building warrant was submitted on or after that date.

Q. What are the next steps for these buildings to ensure resident safety?
A. Fire risk assessments should consider external wall cladding systems. This is particularly important for those buildings clad with ACM-PE (partial and extensive) and mitigation measures should be implemented as necessary. Local Authority Building Standards departments have indicated the process of replacement of ACM-PE where reported is planned or underway. The two buildings extensively clad in ACM-PE are going through a building warrant application process at present and

work is expected to start in the summer 2020. The total programme time is expected to be two years to complete replacement work. The developer has taken responsibility for the works and is undertaking a test programme to ensure that any replacement cladding meets A1/A2 requirements. This means the cladding system will be non-combustible (A1) or does not contribute to fire growth (A2).

In one building with partial ACM-PE cladding, a management process has been put in place to mitigate risk, including evacuation alert sounders.

SG officials have liaised regularly with relevant Local Authority Building Standards departments where it has been reported that ACM-PE has been installed on high rise domestic buildings. We will continue to liaise and work with Local Authorities, with a preference for ACM-PE replacement where necessary.

Q. Why has the information reported on external cladding been redacted from the data?

A. The information reported on cladding (questions 3.2 to 3.5.1) has been redacted to ensure that fire safety concerns are addressed. This redaction is in line with approaches adopted by other administrations, where cladding characteristics are not reported for individual buildings.

Q. How can I find out this information about my building?

A. As with other information contained in building warrant applications, residents of high-rise buildings who would like to know more about their particular building may contact the relevant LA BS department.