

Feature Writer of the Year

Safe as houses

This was the first in a series of three features for Building magazine looking at the ramifications of the Grenfell Tower fire for the construction industry. These features got behind the complex technical and regulatory issues raised by Grenfell, examined how these had been functioning and had contributed to the disaster. The pieces also looked at proposals to address these shortcomings and whether these would produce the desired outcomes. Each feature aimed to explain highly complex issues to a general audience.

The first feature looked at product standards and testing regimes which were criticised in the interim Hackitt report as contributory factors to the disaster. This included the confusion between British and European standards, failures with the product testing regime and revealed proposals to introduce a new British standard to regulate controversial desk top studies for the first time.

Issues of control

The second feature in the Grenfell series looked at the building regulations enforcement regime. Effective compliance with building regulations is essential if buildings are to be safe. A Metropolitan Police report into failings at Grenfell identified multiple breaches of building regulations. The feature looked at the history of building control and how this has been weakened by deregulation and competition. It explored the acrimony between local authority building control and private approved inspectors and how competition and the inherent conflict of a client paying a regulator for their service has led to falling standards. The piece also examines how weak enforcement and low fines has contributed to widespread breaches of building regulations.

Combustible materials ban: What would it mean?

When the Hackitt Review was launched there was widespread disappointment that it didn't recommend that combustible cladding materials were banned outright. Anxious to limit political damage, the government quickly launched a consultation proposing a ban. The feature explored whether there were sound reasons for such a ban or whether it motivated by politics. The feature revealed an outright ban could have significant implications for the industry and could spell the end of the burgeoning cross laminated timber industry, a material displacing concrete for residential buildings due to its speed of construction, performance and sustainability credentials. Each of the three features was accompanied by a leader and news stories written by myself.