



Shahid Malik MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State

Department for Communities and Local Government

Eland House
Bressenden Place
London SW1E 5DU

Bryan Cope
Chairman - South East Fire and Rescue Services
Regional Management Board
c/o Kent Fire and Rescue Service
Freepost NAT9369
Maidstone
ME15 6BR

Tel: 0303 444 3461
Fax: 0303 444 3291
E-Mail: shahid.malik@communities.gsi.gov.uk

www.communities.gov.uk

Our Ref: SM/002692/10

06 APR 2010

Dear Bryan

Thank you for your letter of 27 January about domestic sprinklers, and the decision by the Welsh Assembly Government to have the powers to ask for sprinklers in new residential buildings. You ask that the English Government adopt a similar approach to Wales on this matter. Please accept my apologies for the delay in replying.

We recognise that sprinklers can be an effective risk mitigation measure, particularly where their provision is targeted at buildings where the occupants are most at risk from fire. However, they are not a panacea and it is important they are considered as part of a package of measures, both active (e.g. smoke alarms) and passive (fire resistant construction materials and compartmentation) and effective building management.

It may be helpful for me to explain the Government's policies on better regulation. Any new measures that we introduce through regulations must be proportionate, evidence based and justified in terms of the lives that they save and the injuries they can prevent. Before a new measure is introduced the Department to carry out an Impact Assessment. This involves estimating the potential costs and benefits of introducing the measure to ensure that those measures that are introduced are demonstrably proportionate to the problem they seek to address.

The latest edition of Approved Document B, which gives guidance on compliance with the fire safety aspects of Building Regulations, came into effect in April 2007. The extensive review that preceded the development of this new guidance considered a 4 year research project looking at the issue of residential and domestic sprinklers from both an effectiveness and cost/benefit perspective. The review, which included public consultation concluded that it would not be cost effective to provide sprinklers in all new homes but that it would be reasonable to provide them in blocks of flats over 30m in height where the risk were shown to be greater. A provision to this effect was, therefore, included in the revised Approved Document. We therefore do not intend revisiting Part B of the Building Regulations again until 2013 at the earliest.

We are, of course, aware of the recent developments in Wales on the issue of domestic sprinklers. However, decisions about standards for fire protection in devolved administrations are a matter for those administrations. Whilst there does seem to be appear to be considerable support for the proposed Legislative Competence Order in the Welsh Assembly, there is an expectation that, in line with England, a full and detailed analysis of the costs and benefits would be produced before any possible measure is put forward. Once this information is available it would be a matter for the Assembly as to whether or not to support any such measure and ask for sprinklers in new dwellings.

Best wishes



SHAHID MALIK MP