



LONDON FIRE BRIGADE

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Dany Cotton QFSM
London Fire Commissioner

Rt Hon Theresa May MP
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London Fire Brigade is run by the London
Fire and Emergency Planning Authority

Date: 18 August 2017

Dear Prime Minister,

Thousands of dangerous white goods are still being used in homes across the UK.

This week marks the 12 month anniversary of a major fire at Shepherds Court in Shepherd's Bush. The fire destroyed the homes and all the possessions of a number of families living in the tower block. The fire investigation showed that the fire was caused by a faulty Indesit tumble dryer which was subject to the corrective action/safety notice by Whirlpool, the parent company.

A year on people across the UK are still using white goods that pose a serious fire risk and are subject to recall or corrective action. Worse still, some fridges and freezers are still being produced with a flammable plastic backing, which offers very little protection against the insulation foam inside catching alight if a fire starts.

We are deeply concerned that, a year after Shepherds Court, decisive action is still needed to improve product recalls and manufacturing standards for white goods in the UK.

There are the three fires a day involving tumble dryers in the UK and the devastating fire at Grenfell Tower started in a fridge freezer.

In 2010 36-year old Santosh Benjamin Muthiah died from the effects of smoke inhalation after saving his wife and two young children from a fire in their Wealdstone home that was found to have been caused by a faulty Beko fridge freezer. The Coroner recommended a series of measures to improve product recalls, but these changes have still not been made.

In 2011 Muna Elmufatish, 41 and five of her children Hanin, 14, Basma, 13, Amal, nine, Mustafa, five and Yehya, two all died in a fire at their home in Sonia Gardens in Neasden which was caused by a Whirlpool chest freezer.

There has been over three years of reports and recommendations but as yet no action from Government.

We appreciate that the Government has been looking into these issues and commend the work that Margot James at the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy has undertaken.

We are extremely concerned, however, that the review of the UK product recall system was first announced in November 2014. This was then launched in March 2015 with consumer champion, Lynn Faulds Wood leading the review which reported in February 2016 with a series of recommendations. A steering group was then set up to take these forward. Following the Shepherds Court fire, a new working group to replace the steering group was set up in autumn 2016 which published its recommendations in July 2017. We are now awaiting a Government response to the report which we understand is due in the autumn.

This means that the process of review has been ongoing for almost three years and as yet there has been no substantial changes made to improve this system. What is needed now is action.

There are some simple things the Government can do. For instance, it is extremely difficult for consumers to check if appliances they have in their home are subject to product recall. We believe there should be one, trusted, searchable place to look up your appliances – this should be set up centrally on gov.uk¹.

We are also concerned that the review process did not address manufacturing standards for white goods². For example, all fridges and freezers should be constructed to keep flammable insulation material protected from the components in the appliance which could cause a fire. All appliances should be marked with the model/serial number so they can be identified after a fire. There needs to be improvements in the way that producers and distributors undertake assessments of how safe white goods are to specifically take into account the risk of a fire starting while people are asleep.

We are writing to you now to call for the recommendations of the working group report to be acted upon swiftly and in full, to include a single register for UK product recalls. We also call upon the Government to put its full weight behind bringing about changes in the international standards for how white goods are manufactured and to look at what can be done to bring about these changes more quickly in the UK.

Yours sincerely,



Dany Cotton
London Fire Commissioner



Fiona Twycross AM
Chair, LFEPA



Gareth Bacon AM
Lead Conservative Member,
LFEPA



Rt Hon Sadiq Khan
Mayor of London



Paul Embery
Executive Council Member (London)
Fire Brigades Union



Stewart Edgar
Lead for Prevention
National Fire Chiefs Council



Phil Buckle
Chief Executive
Electrical Safety First

Cc.

Home Office: Rt Hon Amber Rudd MP and Nick Hurd MP

Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy: Rt Hon Greg Clark MP and Margot James MP

Department for Communities and Local Government: Rt Hon Sajid Javid MP and Alok Sharma MP

¹ The current page - <https://productrecall.campaign.gov.uk> - directs people to third party sites and is not easy to search. Margot James has asked if a single central register and the requirement for companies to notify Government of any recalls is needed. The answer is yes.

² Work in the BSI committee (CPL/61) is ongoing but five years after concerns were first raised this issue has still not been resolved.