

**LETTERS**

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## Towering inferno saga continues

**THE** Consumers' Association of Penang is concerned with the lack of regard by the authorities for fire safety.

On Feb 13 a fire started during maintenance work on the EPF building in Petaling Jaya and spread quickly because the cladding on its exterior wall was made from a material that did not comply with specifications.

News reports say the material is polyethylene/polyurethane/polystyrene; in general we call this material poly-foam.

Last July, CAP had voiced its concerns that high-rise buildings in Malaysia could possibly share the same fate as Grenfell Tower in London that went up in flames because of the non-fire retardant cladding (aluminium sheets with a polyethylene core) on the exterior wall of the building.

We wrote to the Fire Department, Ministry of housing and Local Government and we were informed that all buildings in Malaysia adhere to the Uniform Building By-Laws 1984 (UBBL 1984).

The UBBL states that material used on the exterior of a building must be non-combustible or Class O material, if the cladding is less than 1.2 metres away from the external wall or (even if the distance between cladding and exterior wall is more than 1.2 metres) is more than 18 metres in height.

If the UBBL were truly being adhered as we have been informed by the authorities then the fire incident at



ZULFADHLI ZAKI/  
THESUN

EPF building on fire on Feb 13. Action must be taken against all parties who allow flammable materials to be used in building renovation projects.

the EPF building would not have happened.

If for some reason the Fire Department had been delayed and reached the EPF building later than the reported five minutes, the incident could have very well been a repeat of the tragedy that happened at Grenfell Tower.

In light of this, we call on the relevant authorities to take the following measures immediately:

- ▶ The Fire and Rescue Department must conduct mandatory checks across the country at all high-rise buildings to ensure that safety specifications have been complied with;
- ▶ The UBBL must be amended to specify that material used for cladding

(or anything similar to that) should be non-flammable/fire retardant. Material that is "less flammable" should not be acceptable;

- ▶ It must be mandatory for the Fire and Rescue Department to inspect a building after it has undergone renovations to determine whether it is safe;
- ▶ Action must be taken against all parties who allow flammable materials to be used in building renovation projects; and
- ▶ Action must be taken to ensure that the UBBL 1984 is gazetted in all the states in Malaysia.

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