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*D - Mr Bedford,*

Thank you for your letter of 18 August following your investigation into the death of six year old Isabella Pritchard in 2012 who was struck by a falling stone mantelpiece. You have provided me with a copy of your Regulation 28 Report calling for my response that sets out actions taken or proposed to prevent future deaths.

May I stress at the outset how sorry I was to hear about the tragic death of this young girl. Although such events are thankfully rare my department is aware of a small number of similar instances and has previously considered and worked with others to act upon this.

The Building Regulations do not control fixtures such as decorative fireplace surrounds. The issue was previously considered by the Building Regulations Advisory Committee, industry experts and technical specialists from my department who looked at options for revising the statutory guidance in relation to compliance with the Building Regulations' requirements on structures (Approved Document A).

At the time, it was considered unlikely that regulation would be the most effective way of controlling this type of work, much of which is decorative in nature and is often carried out by householders rather than professionals. It was felt that it would be difficult to enforce requirements on householders and awareness of building regulations amongst this group is low. Instead it was considered that there was a need to get more general guidance on the fixing of fireplace surrounds to a wider audience so my department has worked with others to make such good practice guidance on fireplace installations more widely available.

Agencies and external partners who have published guidance include:

- The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents has promoted the importance of safe installation of stone fireplace surrounds.
- In April 2013, the Health and Safety Executive issued a safety alert aimed at suppliers of stone fireplace surrounds of the need to provide adequate fixings as well as instructions on safe installation.
- In October 2013, the National House Building Council issued standards in relation to fixing fireplace surrounds for new homes.
- In 2012, the Stone Federation of Great Britain made best practice guidance on the fixing of stone fireplace surrounds publicly available on its website and updated this guidance in January 2015.
- The Standing Committee on Structural Safety (SCOSS) issued Report 145 drawing structural engineers' attention to the issue.

A lot has been done to raise awareness however; given the tragic nature of this incident I will ask the Building Regulations Advisory Committee to re-consider their previous advice not to regulate for stone fire surrounds (and other heavy decorative items that require substantial fixings for their safety, such as large mirrors). Additionally I will make arrangements through authorised schemes, including the Gas Safe Register and HETAS, to alert their registered installers of gas fires and wood burning stoves to good practice guidance on the fixing of stone fireplace surrounds.

I will also ask my officials to continue to work with other agencies and external partners to keep guidance on fireplace installations up to date and available.

I note that your report was also sent to the Rt Hon Greg Clark MP, Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and his office responded separately on 29 August 2017.

I would be grateful if you could convey my sympathy onto Isabella's family.

  
RT HON SAJID JAVID MP