



Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang Consumers Association of Penang

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Letter to the Editor

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MALAYSIA'S TOWERING INFERNOS?

The Consumers' Association of Penang is horrified by the news of the Grenfell Tower "Inferno" disaster. With the number of high rise buildings littering our country, it is not hard to imagine such an incident happening in Malaysia. More frightening is the current development trend of building high density skyscrapers – with this we have effectively increased the number of people residing in these death traps.

Based on the complaints CAP has received from residents of flats and other high rise buildings, we are faced with the unnerving fact that many of the factors that were prerequisite to the disaster on 14 June in North Kensington, London's public housing flats are also issues that are faced by the residents of high-rise buildings in our country.

Some of the complaints we have received at CAP so far include:

- High rise building safety standards not being complied with
- Management corporation ignoring residents when they highlight safety problems
- Grill structures blocking emergency stairwells
- Broken fire extinguishers and sprinkler system remain unfixed
- Building material used believed to be substandard

When these problems are brought to the attention of the Commissioner of Buildings (COB), the proper authority to deal with problems involving strata properties, we expect that they will be rectified but that is not what happens - the problems persist.

We find that the extent of the action by COB is to write letters to the management corporation, letters that are readily ignored. Any follow up done by COB will follow the same cycle.

Who are the residents of high rise buildings supposed to rely on to ensure the safety of their lives if not their management corporation and the authority in charge of strata properties? The answer is there is no one else.

To quote the age old cliché, the situation in many of our high rise buildings, especially the low cost and medium low cost flats that are old and have not been maintained well coupled with the fact that the relevant authority is not taking effective action, is "a recipe for disaster".

Let the Grenfell Tower incident be a lesson to not only developers and contractors of our building industry but also to the management corporations and COBs in this country as well. Do not remain complacent with the notion that incidents such as this tragedy do not happen. If it can happen in a country that claims to be developed then it can definitely happen here in Malaysia.

We ask that our existing high rise buildings be inspected immediately by the relevant authority to determine whether they comply with existing safety standards. Prevention is better than cure. It is also imperative that the building industry reconsider its current obsession with building these skyscrapers. It is time to take the safety of would be home owners into consideration and build lower to the ground.

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