

Jeremy Corbyn Calls For All Tower Blocks To Be Fitted With Sprinklers After Grenfell Blaze

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All council and high-rise blocks should be fitted with sprinklers in the wake of the Grenfell Tower blaze, Jeremy Corbyn will say today, as he calls for the Chancellor to set aside £1 billion in the Budget to fund it.

The Labour leader wants blocks to be retrofitted with sprinklers because only two percent of tower blocks have them, he said, despite research showing they extinguish or contain fires in 99 percent of cases. The Government has so far refused to fund councils to retrofit sprinklers in the wake of June's fire that killed at least 80 people and sparked a nationwide inquiry.

In a speech on Thursday Corbyn is also due to criticise Conservative cuts to fire services and the "dangerously neglected" state of social housing.

"Five months on from the Grenfell Tower Fire, still only 2 percent of tower blocks have sprinklers and councils claim they have been denied funding for these vital measures," Corbyn is to say.

"The Government is failing to learn the lessons from this tragedy. I urge the Chancellor to use the Budget to urgently provide the funds needed to retrofit sprinklers, ensuring people in thousands of tower blocks across our country are living in safety and with peace of mind.

"The Grenfell Tower fire was an entirely avoidable human disaster that must not be repeated."

Two coroners' reports in 2013 into the high rise fires at Lakanal House and Shirley Towers recommended that sprinklers be fitted into social housing blocks.

Corbyn highlighted that many councils and housing associations "lack the funds" to retrofit sprinklers and blamed 40 percent Conservative cuts to local authorities since 2010.

Corbyn is due to say that people “simply did not believe that such a horrifying event could take place in 2017, “in Britain’s richest borough, in the 5th richest nation on earth”.

“But tragically it didn’t happen by chance, but because of shockingly avoidable political decisions, driven by a cruel and failed economic ideology,” he added.

The Labour leader said funding sprinklers was “just common sense and will protect thousands of lives”, adding that it was an “immediate step” that Theresa May must take in the Autumn Budget.

“We must make sure that nothing like the fire at Grenfell Tower can ever happen again. But to make sure it doesn’t we need action and we need action now,” he said.

Corbyn is also to raise today the “politically driven austerity” faced by firefighters, “who battled that deadly inferno for hours”, and other emergency workers.

“In the last seven years, 10,000 frontline firefighter jobs have gone - equivalent to one in six positions,” he said. “This is a staggering figure and is compounded by the loss of fire stations, equipment and the loss of almost a third of fire safety inspectors in the same period, with some areas such as West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue, which covers the city of Leeds, having lost as many as 70% of its inspectors.

“Indeed, because of the continual loss of firefighters’ jobs, if the fire at Grenfell had occurred outside of London, there would not have been enough firefighters in the vicinity to tackle a blaze of that size.”

Corbyn said Labour is committed to recruiting 3,000 new firefighter jobs.