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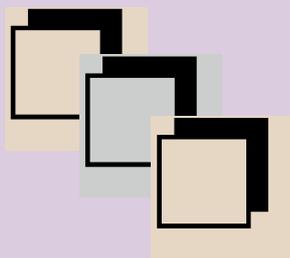
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# THE FABRICATOR

## Comment

It isn't very often you see the industry get a mention in mainstream news. Consumer programmes, sure, they are forever bashing the 'double glazing' industry but this was the BBC news website. So I was a bit surprised to see a mention of Manse Masterdoor and then Synseal in a report on the Grenfell Tower. Let me say here and now that Synseal was an innocent bystander in this. It acquired Manse Masterdoor (along with LB Plastics) in 2014. The doors mentioned in the report were installed in Grenfell Tower in 2011/12.

Now the controversy starts. The door recovered from a lower floor in Grenfell Tower was sent for test by the Metropolitan police. We do not know where it was tested but most likely at the BRE. It was rated as having 30 minutes integrity but failed after 15 minutes.

Passive fire protection can be tricky and to comment properly you need to know a lot about the product and how it was tested to gain its fire rating. It has been alleged that some fire rated products are not tested as a whole component. A statement from West Port Window & Door Technology says: "It is frighteningly common for manufacturers to test door components separately rather than testing the complete door." Not something that I have come across and no one is suggesting that that happened in this case. Even the best manufactured product relies on correct installation and subsequent maintenance. None of this can we know; nor can we know about the original specification or how the door was used. The strategy to compartmentalise a fire – hence the advice given on the night that residents should stay in their flats – singularly fails if a fire barrier fails. As it would appear happened in this case. It is also worth noting that great compromise, the Building Regulations, recommends – recommends mark you – that fire doors should be subject to UKAS accredited third party certification. There is a suggestion that the reason it is only recommended is because of 'cost to the industry'.

On a visit to BSI many years ago, and new to the industry, I was a bit shocked to learn that standards were put together by industry consensus not by boffins testing products to destruction. It seems good old British compromise is at work everywhere, never mind whether lives are going to be at risk. Astronaut John Glenn, when asked about his feelings on going into space replied: "As I hurtled through space, one thought kept crossing my mind – every part of this rocket was supplied by the lowest bidder on a government contract." And there I suspect is the nub of this and many other problems.

Of course fire doors are not the reason that the fire spread up the building. There were, it seems, many factors at play there. But it has to be asked whether a bit more money from a pretty wealthy local authority might have produced a different outcome. And perhaps we should not here speculate on whether some of the decisions had something to do with the social standing of the residents.

Whatever the outcomes of the enquiries into the disaster at Grenfell Tower a few things seem clear. We need a better system of creating standards and regulations. The testing industry can only produce results against the parameters that are set. You may have gathered from past comments that I have little time for governments or faith in their willingness to work in the interest of their constituents. I hope that on this occasion we will see legislation to toughen up building regulations without influence from vested interests and that will make safety, especially fire safety, a matter of law not compromise.

*John Roper*