

Fire safety checks fall while number of deaths rise

By Hayley Dixon

FIRE safety inspections of homes across England have fallen by a fifth in the past seven years, official figures show.

Data released by the Home Office in the wake of the Grenfell Tower tragedy also shows that the number of deaths caused by fire rose by more than 50 per cent last year.

The revelations come after Labour MP David Lammy suggested the true number of people killed in the west London blaze may have been suppressed to prevent riots.

The MP for Tottenham admitted he had “no idea” if the total was being covered up, but he was “sympathetic” to the theory.

Speaking on BBC2’s *Newsnight*, he said there was a “gap” between what people have said they had seen and what the official figures have shown.

The latest figures, which do not include the 79 people who have either

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been confirmed dead or who are missing and presumed dead after the west London blaze, reveal that in 2016/17 41 lives were lost in house fires, compared with 26 the year before, but down from a peak of 54 in 2010/11.

Meanwhile, the number of fire safety audits have dropped by almost a fifth since 2009. These are routine, planned inspections where a fire safety officer assesses the level of compliance with regulations.

If officers believe fire safety measures are inaccurate, they can take action by issuing an informal notice suggesting improvements or a formal notice requiring them.

Fire services carried out 63,201 checks in England in 2015/16 – up by 7 per cent from the previous year, but 18 per cent down on 2009/10 (77,532).

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Grenfell Tower residents had warned for years that the building was an accident waiting to happen and failing on fire safety standards. According to information released by Kensington and Chelsea Council under the Freedom of Information Act before the inferno, the last time the 24-storey block was subject to a full Fire Risk Assessment was December 2015.

Since the deadly blaze, the Chalcots estate in Camden, north London, has been evacuated.