

David Sugden, Chairman of the **Passive Fire Protection Federation** ([www.pfpf.org](http://www.pfpf.org)), looks at best practice on complying with the new fire law; what to look for, how to find it and how to maintain it.

### **Passive fire protection is fundamental to fire safety**

The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (RRFSO)<sup>1</sup>. became law on 1<sup>st</sup> October, putting responsibility – and liability – for compliance on the ‘responsible person’, an additional role for facilities managers. Businesses and organisations that do not have a relevant and up-to-date risk assessment face prosecution - and their insurance may be invalidated, so the implications are far reaching.

The new fire safety law is a fundamental change from previous regulations. It focuses on fire prevention, and those nominated as a ‘responsible person’ will have to complete a risk assessment of the building. One key area often neglected in fire strategies and assessments is structural, or passive fire protection. Extinguishers and alarms are easily spotted, ‘active’ fire protection products. But most measures are ‘passive’ built into the fabric of a building and make up the Fire Separating Elements (FSE) and framework, including such items as wired glass, fire resistant paint and fire resistant ductwork.

### **Out of sight, out of mind**

It’s no surprise then, that many facilities managers are unaware of what they’re looking for, or even how to look for it. But passive fire protection measures must be correctly maintained. Not only do they ensure a building’s structure remains stable during fire, passive fire protection measures keep escape routes safe, limiting the spread of fire, heat, and smoke, so people have time to get out and fire officers have time to get in.

As well as covering ‘general fire precautions’ and safety duties needed to protect ‘relevant persons’, Facilities Managers should:

- Take action to reduce or remove risks

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<sup>1</sup> S.I. 2005 No. 1541.

- Put in place fire precautions to protect against any remaining risks
- Review and update your risk assessment

If five or more people are employed at the premises, managers must record significant findings from the assessment.

Facilities managers also need to be aware of the Fire Safety (Workplace) regulations and provide a Fire Safety Manual for the buildings for which they are responsible.

Modern commercial and public buildings are in constant flux. Building services often create the greatest risk of uncontrolled fire spread, so planned breaches of FSE and their recovery are of prime importance in risk control.

### **Fire safety and facilities management**

Facilities managers have a key role to play in managing installation to meet legal standards. They are often empowered to plan and supervise the installation of new services and to ensure fire safety protection. The facilities manager can have a fundamental impact on the maintenance of the passive measures through careful planning and control.

### **Passive fire protection measures Facilities Managers should check:**

1. Identify and mark all Fire Separating Elements (FSEs) and escape routes
2. Check the routing of all pipes, cables and anything that penetrates the FSE or impinges on escape routes. Also ensure the pipes etc. are sound and use fire rated materials
3. Identify all ductwork routes, and check the ductwork for fire rating, integrity and position of dampers
4. Ensure all fire doors are sound and correctly rated, closers operate and gaps are correct
5. Check all hidden voids (e.g. service ducts, suspended ceilings or loft areas) for adequate fire sealing and fire separation
6. Ensure all work on or within the building maintains the integrity of the FSEs or escape routes. All workers should understand the function of an FSE. Anyone fitting passive fire protection measures should be properly qualified and preferably part of an accredited installer scheme.
7. Maintain a Fire Safety Manual, ensuring everyone knows what it is for and where it is.

8. Full records and an audit trail should be kept detailing all passive fire protection measures in a building, maintaining the Construction Design and Management Safety File. This file logs all work done and material used throughout construction where safety is concerned and should be kept up to date with all maintenance and any modifications recorded.

Managers should also ensure any future modifications to a building don't negate the effectiveness of passive fire protection measures. Closers on fire doors, for example, should be maintained. The web site at [www.pfpf.org.uk](http://www.pfpf.org.uk) has a full range of downloadable free advice on Best Practice for all PFP measures and contact details for the members listed below

New and recently constructed buildings will have inherent PFP to meet modern standards. Older non-domestic premises need to be checked to ensure that existing measures are appropriate, legal and up-to-date. Each individual property has its own individual requirements and PFP is built into the structure of new buildings, with on average, two-thirds of the fire safety budget spent on passive measures.

Through the development or adoption of maintenance strategies for passive fire protection building owners and users can mitigate all manner of such tangible risks. This is a worthwhile investment:

## **ENDS**

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