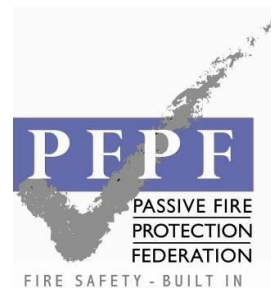


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Lakanal House: PFPF statement

The Lakanal House tragedy and subsequent inquest serves to highlight a number of concerns with the fire safety regime in England. The Passive Fire Protection Federation (PFPF) wishes to express its great sadness that it has taken such a tragic loss of life to draw attention to these issues, and offers its condolences to the families of those who perished.



The jury's verdicts highlight a lack of understanding of in-built fire protection and a general failure to comply with the principles of fire safety regulations. The incident demonstrates the devastating consequences of failing to install and maintain adequate fire protection within buildings.

While these findings are shocking, sadly they come as no surprise to the PFPF. One of the Federation's goals is to promote best practice in fire safety and it recently launched a campaign aimed at improving fire safety enforcement and compliance in response to what it describes as a general lack of respect for fire safety regulations and regulatory guidance.

PFPF Chair Mike Wood declares: "Earlier this year I warned that the fire safety industry often has to fight for consideration to be given to quite basic fire safety principles, such as elements of design, specification, product selection, product use, construction processes and installation.

"Incorrect assumptions are often made about product performance and a lack of knowledge about how inbuilt fire protection works can often see fire resistant products installed or maintained incorrectly or, even worse, replaced by materials that offer no protection at all."

Mr Wood calls for improved education and training for all the various groups of professionals involved in the design, specification, construction and management of buildings, not only on the importance of fire risk assessment, but also on the importance of ensuring the competency of those who undertake such services. He also highlights the importance of ensuring that those employed to install and maintain fire protection systems are competent to do so, and warns of the need to focus on the validity of risk-based design decisions that make unwarranted assumptions about the likelihood of fire and the performance of building materials.

"Suitably skilled, experienced and qualified specialists are available who could readily provide the required services. It really couldn't be simpler and yet they are often not engaged," says Mr Wood.

"The passive fire protection industry offers a range of third party certification schemes both for products and installers and there are similar professional registration and certification schemes available for fire risk assessors. Such schemes ensure competency since they are regularly audited by accredited certification bodies to ensure that standards are maintained.

"Choosing a third party certificated product provides peace of mind that a product is fit for purpose, is manufactured within a defined quality system and meets all the relevant standards. And to ensure that the product is installed and maintained correctly, choose a third party certificated installer, for assurance that they have the relevant expertise and skills."

The PFPF recognises the need to educate the wider community and notes that several initiatives are under way, including the development of a national industry training scheme for passive fire protection, which aims to up-skill contractors involved in the installation of passive fire protection, as well as improve the knowledge base of those involved in the design, supply, inspection and maintenance of passive fire protection.

But, says Mr Wood, the specialist fire safety industry as a whole has the expertise and knowledge to advance fire safety best practice and should continue to work together through the Fire Sector Federation to achieve both recognition of the importance of attention to detail in fire safety and proper attention to the application of acceptable and suitable measures in practice.

The PFPF will comment in due course on the detail of the evidence and on the Coroner's recommendations.

ENDS

Notes for Editors

The PFPF (www.pfpf.org) is the body for the built-in fire protection industry, and is dedicated to growing awareness of fire protection and the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. Membership includes the Chief Fire Officers Association, the DCLG, Local Authority Building Control and the Fire Test Study Group (UK) Ltd.

A basic requirement of fire safety building design is to make provisions in the structure of the building to minimise the chances of fire spread and to limit the impact of the effects of combustion, together with fire separation to protect the means of escape. This is normally carried out by using the basic structure of the building to contain fire at source, through compartmentation.

Compartmentation is also used to provide functional escape routes to a place of safety through appropriate design. It relies on the products used in the fire-rated building elements being properly tested, approved, installed and maintained.

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