

Article for IFP magazine

Industry Working Together on PFP Matters

The total spend on PFP in the UK is typically more than £1.2 billion (installed value) per annum but spread over many different trade sectors. This fragmented nature of the industry has posed problems over the years for Government regulators, standards bodies and those concerned with many aspects of construction such as European legislation and industry contact.

The Passive Fire Protection Federation (PFPF) was founded some 10 years ago to provide a single point of contact on PFP matters for Government Departments and Regulatory Authorities. Its intention was and is to provide a forum where those involved in the industry could agree common approaches to matters of mutual concern. In this respect it has been very constant and successful over these years and the members intend that it should continue to provide a suitable focal point. There is a higher level of change in progress at this time than ever before for the fire community with revisions to Approved Document B, the Regulatory Reform Order, the Integrated Risk Management plans of the brigades and the implementation of the Construction Products Directive. The Federation provides an established forum for discussion on all these matters.

The Nature of the PFP industry

All materials used to construct buildings and other structures have a natural reaction to fire and the regulations require a known level of performance to ensure life safety for individuals. Because of this requirement people who build the framework, install doors and windows or the myriad of services that we require these days may, on occasion have to prove the fire performance of their part of the building. The fire performance requirement applies as a horizontal factor across all sectors of the construction industry and the membership of the PFPF clearly illustrates the wide diversity of trades that have to consider fire as part of their business.

Readers will see from the list of members shown in **(Use side bar to show membership list?)** that these are mostly either trade associations or bodies of a similar nature. They fall into two groups; full members and liaison members in order to provide the basic function for which the Federation was originally founded. The trade bodies vary from those such as the ASFP whose primary interest is fire protection to bodies such as the British Woodworking Federation or the Glass and Glazing Federation for whom fire is only part of the work they do for their industry.

Another concern of all the members, and of the construction industry in general is the quality of PFP materials and their installation. It is true to say that PFP measures cannot be tested in situ like alarms or sprinklers and other active elements of the fire strategy and yet if the strategy is to work as intended the structure of the building must react as expected when fire breaks out. The PFP industry therefore has developed a number of product certification and installer accreditation schemes to give the regulator and user

some confidence that the required performance will be there when needed. The bodies running all such schemes are members of the PFPF and use the forum to work with the Trade Associations and Government to develop their schemes to meet the needs of modern construction.

In addition to the “Full Members” there are a number of Liaison Members who have an interest in PFPF matters and these are shown in the list also.

Activities

Originally the Liaison membership included both the DETR and the Home Office (Fire Inspectorate) and even though these bodies are now both within the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) they are still represented at meetings which are held 3 or 4 times per year as required by events. These meetings allow a passage of information to the industry on changes in Building Regulations or Workplace and Occupancy regulation and allow the officials to get a clear idea of the impact of planned changes.

Often, particularly with the growth of European legislation there are changes that require new test methods and performance standards and the Federation set-up allows discussion of such changes that are particularly valuable to the member bodies that are not concerned with fire as their major function. Similarly those regulators such as Building Control Surveyors, Trading Standards Officers and Fire Inspectors have a need to understand the complexity of new and existing legislation and performance standards where construction products are concerned.

When the UK representative attends the European Regulators Group meetings in Brussels he has a need to understand the implications for British Industry of any changes being proposed and the PFPF allows suitable opportunities for briefing in both directions. Similarly the activities of BSI in producing the required Testing and Performance Standards need to incorporate an understanding of the requirements of industry and recent meetings between PFPF representatives and BSI management have served to examine problem areas for both parties in these matters.

The longest established sub-group within the PFPF is the Industry and Enforcement Authorities Liaison Group (IEALG) where PFPF representatives meet with inspection and regulatory bodies to discuss problems and offer solutions that assist both sides in their work. Publications emanating from this group through the Federation include “A Pocket Guide for Fire Test Reports & Assessments” aimed at Building Control Surveyors and others who have to approve the use of products and may be confused by the many reports and assessments presented by manufacturers. Also published is the “Guide to Undertaking Assessments in Lieu of Fire Tests” that provides an overview of the way in which particular performance of PFPF products may be assessed when a fire test is either not available or not appropriate. Again this will help those who are presented with assessments to understand content and appropriateness of the document being offered as proof of performance.

The latest publication is entitled “Demonstrating the Performance of PFP Products” and it is intended to guide people through the CE marking process and gives details of the steps involved and paperwork likely to be raised in the process. All these publications have been produced with the assistance of the UK Fire Test Study Group.

Another area of concern that is coming out of the European requirements and has not really been addressed in UK legislation is the interaction of different products when used together within a fire design. The Technical Group of the PFPF are considering the implications of this area of concern as it gives the specialists in differing areas of activity the opportunity to meet and consider where they provide information and guidance that will ensure that products are complementary in their extended application and assessment of performance.

Quality, Training and Trade

The recently published guide “Ensuring Best Practice for Fire Protection in Buildings” which, although it is an ASFP publication was produced with the co-operation of members of the PFPF, is another example of how sectors of the industry are working together. The guide offers sources of information on all aspects of PFP in buildings and should assist anyone from the building owner or developer through the regulator, designer and installers to get the information they need for their work. Occupiers of buildings change the layout, services and occupation levels starting immediately they move in and this guide shows where to get help and information on how they can ensure that their risk assessments are sufficiently thorough to achieve the objective of protecting the occupants in the event of fire.

When, in 1999 the Fire Industry Confederation (FIC), with the Backing of the DTI, produced the first Trade Survey of the UK Fire Protection Industry the PFPF was a prime source of contacts that allowed the authors to get a complete picture of the industry. This was continued in the 2001 survey and gives a clear picture of the size and diversity of the industry and the membership of the PFPF provided the information in these surveys. Contact with the UK Trade and Industry section of the DTI is maintained and Industry based Trade Missions have visited countries in the Middle and Far East to promote exports and work through the PFPF contacts with BSI may well have further benefit to the export sector.

Conclusion

Every workman on a building is likely to have an influence on the fire safety provisions within that building. Every firm that installs services in a building undertakes alterations or maintains the structure of a building can influence the performance of that building in the event of a fire. If their role in these matters is understood they can do their jobs efficiently and halt the rising fire losses that we are currently seeing. The level of co-operation on matters of legislation and standards that we have seen in the PFPF over these last 10 years is an example of how industry and regulators can work together to improve matters.

It is often felt that the reaction of the structure of a building in fire is taken for granted because the Building Regulations require certain levels of performance to be built in and so it must have been constructed in that manner. Experienced property owners, particularly those that have had a fire or two, know that co-operation between tradesmen and material producers is essential if disasters are to be avoided. The very nature of building occupation means that changes are made to structure all the time, it is after all, a dynamic working environment and so risks must be examined and the effects of changes to the structure on those risks considered in the Fire Safety Risk Assessment. Current legislative thinking places the responsibility for fire safety firmly on the owner and/or the occupier.

Insurers are likely to seek higher standards of compartmentation and structural stability if losses are to be reduced and the high rate of attrition in business continuity after major events should concentrate the minds of all business owners in the fire safety of their premises. The PFPF is working to promote co-operation across the PFP industry and regulatory interests to provide a firm platform for the construction and maintenance of fire safe buildings.

More information on the PFPF, its members and publications can be obtained by visiting www.pfpf.org.uk

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