

David Sugden, Chairman of the Passive Fire Protection Federation, on the benefits of using Third Party Certification for passive fire protection measures.

Self-certification isn't good enough for fire safety

Recent changes to regulations covering how LAs can charge for Building Controls inspections have raised questions about built-in fire safety in public buildings. Local Authorities can be at a disadvantage when quoting for building inspections in competition with the private sector but the new regulations allow a downward adjustment in charges where part of the work is carried out by a member of a competent person (self-certification) scheme.

In principle this is fine, but The Passive Fire Protection Federation (PFPF) is concerned about inspection of Passive Fire Protection (PFP). There is no competent person scheme for PFP installation, but many Third Party Certification (TPC) schemes do exist and cover all aspects. Competent person schemes are for the most part self-certified but fire safety expertise is a matter of training, qualification and experience.

Built-in fire protection measures are easily overlooked when an inspector is presented with a finished building. Individual trades don't necessarily have expertise in fire protection, so are unaware of the effect of their work on the performance of the building in a fire and of fire safety principles such as compartmentation, for example.

The Building Regulations now allow LAs to refund or adjust charges where less (or more) work is required than anticipated. As there is no competent person scheme for installing fire protection measures, BCOs should look for PFP work to be done by a TPC contractor. If such a contractor is used he will issue an auditable Certificate of Conformity backed by the scheme and so the work should require fewer inspections, allowing for a reduction in charges as would be the case for a competent person scheme. I would also argue that if work is not done within a TPC scheme BCOs should undertake more inspections, for which they would make additional charges.

Visit the PFPF website (www.pfpf.org) for guidance what to look for in a scheme or attend the PFPF seminar at the BEST exhibition at the NEC in Birmingham, in the Retrofit Hub at 2.30pm, on Wednesday 20th October.

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