



News and views from Fire & Security Consultancy Limited

Welsh government to “radically reform or replace” 2005 Fire Safety Order

BY NATHANIEL BARKER

Fire safety legislation introduced in 2005 “needs to be radically reformed or replaced”, the Welsh housing minister has said.

Julie James (right), housing and local government minister for the Welsh government, made the comments in a letter to a cross-party committee of assembly members published this week.

The Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee called in November for urgent new legislation to replace the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 – which was introduced by the Labour Westminster government of the day. In particular, the committee raised concerns about the order’s loose regulations on fire risk assessments and the fact that it considers flat front doors not to fall under the regulatory remit of fire services.

Ms James’s letter said the Welsh government accepted “in principle” the committee’s recommendation to replace the order with laws requiring new standards for fire risk



assessments and bringing fire doors under fire services’ scrutiny in the current assembly term.

It said: “I agree with the committee that

the Fire Safety Order needs to be radically reformed or replaced.

“The order was not designed for residential buildings and therefore does not address the main risks of fire in such buildings.” However, she added that reform “will require a significant piece, or pieces, of primary legislation” so could not be guaranteed in the current assembly term,

which finishes in 2021. And she said the Welsh government would “continue to work to clarify expectations with regards to fire doors” ahead of fresh legislation.

Ms James accepted or accepted in principle 13 of the committee’s 14 recommendations on high-rise fire safety. These include calls to increase fire service involvement during construction of tall buildings, consider how to encourage building owners to retrofit more sprinklers and explore the feasibility of demanding invasive Type 4 fire risk assessments for all residential high rises.

She rejected a recommendation to allow only Local Authority Building Control (LABC) to sign-off buildings of seven storeys or higher – commenting that neither LABC or the private approved inspectors system “is ‘bad’ per se”.

Nearly 50 councils use unregistered fire risk assessors

BY LUKE BARRATT

Nearly 50 English councils have used unregistered fire risk assessors to check if their buildings are safe, *Inside Housing* can reveal.

While the law does not require fire risk assessors to be registered or meet any professional standards, guidance from the Fire Risk Assessment Competency Council (FRACC) advises building owners to use fire risk assessors listed on one of eight registers run by third-party accreditation bodies.

One hundred and twenty-eight councils responded to Freedom of Information requests about their fire risk assessors, with 46 saying they had used at least one unregistered assessor since 2010. Of these, 23 said that none of the assessors they had used since 2010 were registered. A further 56 did not know whether their assessors were registered, and only 26 said all their assessors were registered.

Dennis Davis, who helped write the FRACC guidance and is chair of the competency workstream at the Fire Sector Federation, told *Inside Housing*: “Our view, and I’m talking from a federation point of view, is that everyone who’s doing this work should be competent and you’ve therefore got to be able to demonstrate that competence.

“Our view would be, go and look at someone who is at least registered with an accreditation organisation because then you know you’re dealing with someone who has been audited and has some capability and quality to them.”

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Jonathan O'Neill, managing director of the Fire Protection Association (FPA), added: "Without any third-party assessment, virtually anyone can set themselves up and call themselves a fire risk assessor. There is no real requirement to have any insurance, to have anyone give you accreditation whatsoever. "It's quite a complicated business, particularly the high-risk stuff.

Even people who have been in our organisation some time, if they're going into fire risk assessment, it's probably two years since the start of training before we'll let them out on their own. "If you get it wrong, it's people's lives you're playing with."

A spokesperson for Barking & Dagenham Council, one of the 23 councils not to use

any registered fire risk assessors, said the authority's assessors had received FPA training.

They added: "The council's principal quality and compliance manager has a fire risk assessor Level 2 qualification from the Institution of Fire Engineers."

More than half of London care homes fail fire safety checks

The majority of care homes recently inspected by the London Fire Brigade failed key fire safety checks, a new report has warned.

The report by the London Fire Brigade found that 57% of the 177 care homes in a series of one-off inspections received a formal notification to address fire safety issues. In 45% of the care homes inspected, the fire risk assessment was found to be not suitable or not sufficiently comprehensive.

One in three premises had inadequate or poorly maintained fire doors and the report concluded there was "widespread confusion" about fire evacuation strategies. The report also warns fire risk assessments are being carried out by people without the proper skills and experience.

Urgent review required

Following the inspections, the London Fire Brigade has now written to every care home in the capital demanding they urgently review their fire risk assessments, emergency plans and staff training.

"Over half the care homes we inspected had to make improvements to their fire safety arrangements despite them housing some of London's most vulnerable residents," said the Brigade's Assistant Commissioner Dan Daly. "My main concern is that this

audit is only the tip of the iceberg. Care home owners need to urgently review their fire risk assessments and ensure their staff know how to safely evacuate their residents, especially those who are immobile. "If you were placing your loved one into the care of others, you would expect them to be safe but for too many people, the very roof they are sleeping under could put them at risk." In 2017, two people died in a Cheshunt care home after a fire travelled through voids in the roof which allowed it to quickly engulf the entire building. Crews from Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue and London Fire Brigade found residents in many rooms, many too frail to move themselves to safety.

Debbie Ivanova, the Care Quality Commission's (CQC) Deputy Chief Inspector of Adult Social Care for the London Region, said: "It's the responsibility of those in charge of running care homes to ensure the right fire protection measures are in place in order to keep people safe.

"Where we find areas of concern, we share these with the local fire service – as the enforcer of fire safety in care homes – and include in our published inspection reports.

These findings will influence whether we judge a service to be outstanding, good, requires improvement or inadequate," she added. "I encourage all care home providers to make full use of these findings so they can make continual improvements that will help keep everyone safe."

Using contractors

The HSE provide a brief guide to using contractors. There is a web-friendly version of leaflet INDG368(rev1), published 06/12. This leaflet is aimed at businesses that use contractors. A contractor is anyone you ask to do work for you who is not an employee. The guidance tells you what you must do to comply with health and safety law when you use contractors. However, it doesn't apply to temporary or agency workers – there is more specific information about them at www.hse.gov.uk/workers/agencyworkers.htm.

Examples of poor workmanship included

- A door that was too heavy and not suitable for structure of the building.
- New carpet fitting stopping the fire door closing
- Wrong electrical connect fitted to 3100 watt oven.

Why fire detection and alarm engineers need qualifications

Getting qualified is a vital process in demonstrating competence in the fire industry.

Fire safety has to be taken seriously – as we have seen from the many devastating fires in the news over the last year or two – and the publication of the Hackitt report certainly highlighted the need for competency.

Some of you reading may remember when the 'Gas Safe' register was brought in (replacing 'Corgi-registered' in 2009), and what a difference that made. It is illegal for anyone not registered to carry out the work of a gas engineer. The reason: **to define competency.**

The biggest risk with incorrectly installed and/or poorly maintained central heating boilers is the most common causes of accidental exposure to carbon monoxide (CO).

Just like gas, fire safety is high-risk. A failure to deliver correctly installed or maintained fire detection and alarm systems could potentially result in the system failing to activate in the event of a fire. Or, perhaps annoying and costly, but less serious – creating far too many false alarms.

About 50 people die every year of CO poisoning (half of which is accredited to exposure to smoke, fire and flames) and 350-400 people die every year from fire-related incidents. This tells you that either Gas-Safe is doing its job, you are more at risk from fire or a combination of both.

Maybe it's time for a 'Fire Safe' Register?

The FIA firmly believes in competency and being able to demonstrate a high level of knowledge and expertise. It might be ambitious to say it – but shouldn't there be a Fire Safe Register too? A list of fully qualified individuals and companies that can 100% prove their expertise?

At this point, it is vital that companies encourage their staff to achieve a full qualification in fire detection and alarms (we have a range of them in design, installing, maintaining and commissioning) thus defining competency. The more individuals who get qualified, the closer we are as an industry to realising the ambition of our own 'Fire Safe' register.

We should be setting the bar high...

...as requested by the industry when polled when we set upon this course of setting up the Awarding Organisation (AO), using the FIA qualifications to help define competency. The FIA has been working hard to ensure that those at government level, as well as consultants, construction companies, and the general public are all astutely aware of our qualifications and the importance of achieving competency.

Even if the government don't mandate an eventual 'Fire Safe' register, they will be looking to ensure that people carrying out their jobs within the fire protection industry are competent, and as such we have both an ethical and moral obligation to ensure competency.

The foundation unit and beyond

The FIA is pleased to offer a series of qualifications developed by our own nationally regulated awarding organisation for the fire detection and alarm sector, the FIA AO (Fire Industry Association Awarding Organisation). If you've passed the foundation (in Fire Detection & Alarm) course, or you have booked your staff onto the Foundation course, but haven't moved on to the later stages of the qualification, you could be missing out on the benefits it brings.

If you need a reminder of how our qualification structure works, the Foundation Course is the 'starter' unit with extensive generic information needed for all disciplines of Fire Detection and Alarm work, and three others need to be completed in order to get the full qualification. Following the Foundation, learners can study

the Health & Safety unit, the Environmental unit and then one of four specialist units (Advanced Design, Installation, Maintenance, or Commissioning).

Our qualifications have been produced in consultation with industry leaders and employers, matching the needs of the industry with what learners really need to understand. We've worked with reference to the National Occupational Standards (NOS), current UK legislation and published standards, along with codes of practice and industry best practice to give learners the opportunity to expand their knowledge and understanding in a format that is in-depth – but delivered under expert guidance.

We provide a number of support materials to ensure success in the qualifications – from pre-learning videos, to a new 'Access to Foundation' course. These have been improved and extended as students have been clearly surprised by the high level of the training and the difficulty of the examinations (under strict examination conditions).

The FIA trainers have many years of experience in the industry and are well placed to teach attendees the necessary information to become competent. Competency comes through years of experience of doing the job and by completing the final specialist unit as part of the full qualification; and defining that competency by passing the exams.

It might go without saying, but getting fully qualified will make you and your staff fully skilled experts within your chosen field, whether that is fire detection and alarm design, installation, maintenance, or commissioning; and that needs to be promoted to contractors, consultants, end users etc. to differentiate yourselves from others.

Benefits of getting the full qualification

Apart from raising the level of professionalism in our industry – just three words: return on investment (ROI).

Getting your staff all the way through the qualification is certainly a big investment of both time and money, especially since we are aware that candidates need to complete a number of units before being completely qualified.

By getting your staff qualified you are demonstrating competency

But as previously stated, the wider industry – government, consultants, construction companies, and the general public – are all being made aware of the need for more stringent fire safety measures. By getting your staff qualified you are demonstrating competency not just at company level (by having Third Party Certification as an example), but also through individuals employed.

The government seems, more than ever, to be aware of the need for fire technician competency. The Hackitt report produced

after the Grenfell Tower tragedy states that there is a 'lack of competency' throughout the industry in almost every discipline and at every stage of construction and maintenance of a building, and as a result it may not be long before we see (hopefully) further government movement towards ensuring that technicians and engineers are competent.

Yes, the bar has indeed been set high, but as previously stated, this was the request of the industry to keep the "cowboys" out of working on life safety systems. We need to define the right level of competency now, and get our people qualified now, so that we are fully prepared for the time when a 'Fire Safe' register may come into force.

For those of you that already install fire alarm systems, it is vital that you start preparing for the time when the government does start mandating – we can't say for certain what will happen next after the Hackitt report, but one thing is clear: the government will be looking for ways to improve competency within the industry.

Get your team qualified

So, if your staff have completed the foundation unit and not moved on to the next set of units in the qualification, you could be missing out. Remember, we only send out certificates to those that have obtained the FULL qualification, not just for one unit, so in order to get that all important certificate, it is vital to book the next course.

The FIA can help your team become qualified to install, maintain, commission and design fire alarm systems. The FIA is the largest fire protection trade association in the UK with 800+ members.

We are a not-for-profit organisation and a major provider of fire safety training. Our objective is to promote, improve and perfect fire protection methods, devices, services and apparatus.

We achieve this through the representation of our members, providing technical support, guidance and opportunities for professional advancement through education and appropriate regulation.

We promote and shape legislation and the professional standards of the fire industry through close liaison with government and official bodies, as well as other key stakeholders.

We also provide funding for research projects in line with our principal objectives, so any money we make from the training we do is invested into funding scientific research to improve fire safety across the UK and beyond.

To learn more about our qualification units and book, visit the FIA website. www.fia.uk.com

Ocado warehouse blaze:

Automated warehouses create new fire protection complexities, says expert

The automation of warehouse logistics and other sectors generates understandable alarm about the implications for job creation.

What it doesn't typically raise are concerns about the ramifications for fire protection. But the issue is now getting media attention after a robot-staffed Ocado warehouse was devastated by fire this week. The fire broke out at the site, in Andover, Hampshire, on Tuesday 5 February and, despite the efforts of around 200 firefighters, has only today, on Friday morning, finally been extinguished.

Spanning 18 acres the site is manned (though that word seems inapt) by 1,100 cuboid swarm robots, which collect groceries from crates and deliver them to a packing station. If robots are more cost-effective than humans – requiring no pay, food or rest – then they do present a fire safety issue: electronics get hot. Furthermore, as one commenter on an Instagram post by BBC journalist Zoe Kleinman wrote, robots “can't smell the smoke when said workplace is on fire.” That's not to say that electronics were to blame in this instance; the cause of the fire remains unclear pending an investigation.

At least if no people are employed, there is no risk to life when fire does break out. Nevertheless, the incident will surely cost the online supermarket millions of pounds in damaged stock (and robots) plus operational disruption.

The latest in a litany of warehouse fires in recent years, the Ocado fire shows once again how fiendishly difficult fire protection is in these environments. The high concentration of an enormous volume of flammable materials means fires take hold and spread rapidly, leaving firefighters to tackle enormous burning buildings.

“Automated warehousing presents challenges resulting from very high storage densities, limited access, electronic conveyancing systems, high racking and cold storage requirements.” Dr James L D Glockling, technical director, Fire Protection Association. “The Ocado warehouse fire is a stark reminder of the instantaneous impact that fire can have on a major business, its operations, and share price,” said Dr James L D Glockling, technical director at the Fire Protection Association. “Automated warehousing facilities present significant fire protection challenges as a result of very high storage densities, limited access, electronic conveyancing systems, high racking, and cold storage requirements.”

The Ocado warehouse reportedly deployed a sprinkler system that has won a global award and which activated correctly.



Photograph courtesy: Ringwood Fire Station

“With (unconfirmed) information emerging that the Ocado warehouse was sprinkler-protected, this sad event will no doubt prompt a thorough investigation as to the circumstances that might have led to the protection system being overwhelmed,” continued Glockling. “Sprinkler system failures are very rare events, they are specifically designed to offer levels of resilience far in excess of any other suppression technology and millions are spent every year around the world ensuring that installation and design rules keep abreast with modern-day challenges and storage methods.”

Although it is too early to comment specifically on the Ocado fire, Glockling said the incident generates wider questions about the challenges posed by modern warehouses. “Although the majority of sprinkler operations result in a fire being extinguished, their design remit is to stop the development of a fire, hold it at a manageable size, and support fire and rescue service intervention (ensuring structural integrity of the building and supporting tenable conditions) for a predefined period of time until it is manually extinguished by them. “With the increasing size of buildings, complexity of internal structures limiting access within the building, and the potential for fire seats (where the fire starts) to be at some height, there may need to be a need to review just how effective fire and rescue services can be expected to be within the sprinkler system design time frame.”

Holistic design

Glockling cautioned against assuming flawed or faulty sprinklers were to blame: “The design of any sprinkler system needs to be accompanied by strict control of the environment it is designed to protect. Any holistic design requires a passive

envelop to work within and control over key parameters that might act to form sustained ignition sources or spread fire, requiring isolation of power, heat, energy systems, and conveyancing systems to name but a few. Failure of any one of these supporting systems could contribute to creating conditions that the sprinkler system was never designed to cope with.

“It is the Fire Protection Association's belief that this isolated event should not detract from the unrivalled reputation sprinkler systems have for performance and for the enormous contribution they make to the protection of the UK's business economy, and that we learn from whatever this teaches us to make future systems better still.” Glockling suggested that regulations have not kept pace with the growing complexity of the problem. “The UK has the laxest mandated requirements for the protection of the commercial estate from fire in Europe – allowing enormous unprotected compartment sizes. Subject to the findings of any investigation, perhaps now might be the time to review this so that the fire and rescue service response and installed protection systems can be designed with knowledge of an upper limit by the constraining of building proportions and compartment size to a level that assures protection performance and FRS response can work in harmony as design demands.

“Might it be that we are finding the limit of what can be reasonably protected?” Ocado, which envisions a people-free platform where the ordering, packing and delivery (via driverless cars) is fully automated, processes 65,000 orders per week at the Andover site. The Ocado model has already been licensed to Morrisons supermarket in the UK, Groupe Casino in France and the Sobeys chain in Canada.