



EUROPEAN FIRE SPRINKLER NETWORK

October 2007 Report

Bernadette Hartley has been diagnosed with a tumour on her lung and has been in and out of hospital during October. She hopes for a biopsy in November but will have to rest for now. Meanwhile she has made some calls to her contacts but cannot play the full, active role she has taken up to now. She has received many messages of support from the fire safety community and we all hope she makes a full recovery.

On a more positive note I learned that the new French high-rise fire safety building code is likely to lead to sprinklers being fitted in most new commercial high-rise buildings. This is a huge change from the position a few years ago.

Meanwhile in Brussels, Members of the European Parliament have introduced amendments to the five-year workplace health and safety strategy which require the collection of data on the impact of fire and an analysis of the benefits from fitting sprinklers in all new workplaces. Also in Brussels CEN TC/127 has been given approval to draft two Technical Reports, or codes of practice, one on hotel fire safety and the other on fire engineering.

Audit

A draft of the audited accounts has been sent to the Treasurer for comments. I would like to present these accounts at the Council meeting in Hamburg at the end of November.

Thessaloniki

At CEN TC/127 meetings I met Professor Kyriakos Papaioannou of Aristotle University and some time ago suggested we organised a seminar in Greece on sprinklers. In October we held this seminar in Thessaloniki. I gave one of the presentations; others were given by EFSN members Tyco and Viking. Greece has suffered severe forest fires this summer so the subject of fire safety now has political attention. It is interesting that in the San Diego forest fires the Rancho Santa Fe community did not lose any homes, even though the surrounding area was totally destroyed. This community keeps vegetation near houses to a minimum, uses non-combustible roof materials and sprinklers all homes.

Today, sprinkler systems are rarely used in Greece, so we have a long way to go. We reached some 60 participants in Thessaloniki and so made a start on spreading the message. Kyriakos Papaioannou was very encouraged and would like to organise a similar event in Athens next year.

Jean-Pierre Petiteau

Jean-Pierre Petiteau is the French fire safety regulator, working within the Direction de la Défense et de la Sécurité Civile, DDSC. I visited him in October to discuss fire safety and how sprinklers can improve it.

The DDSC looks at fire safety in public buildings, high-rise buildings and housing. The Ministère de Travail covers workplaces while the Ministère d'Ecologie covers classified installations (high risk buildings, such as large warehouses). This sort of arbitrary division of responsibilities for fire safety is not unusual in Europe, for example Germany splits responsibility for regulations among its 16 states and the federal government; Spain splits responsibility between industrial and other buildings; while in the UK different departments look after housing, hospitals and schools.

M Petiteau had initiated a review of the French code for high-rise buildings, since the current text is thirty years old. He would not tell me much but did say that there are three categories: over 28m, over 50m and a new category over 200m. His number two, Colonel Alex Maire, now chairs this committee. Colonel Alex Maire told me in September that he has moved from being against sprinklers to seeing value in them. Other fire service personnel are also becoming more positive about sprinklers: in the latest edition of Face au Risque, Commandant Jean-Luc Waeckerli discusses high rise fire safety and writes that in very high-rise buildings the inclusion of an automatic water extinguishing system is desirable. The text is to be finalised by the end of 2007, then sent to Brussels to check it does not contradict any European laws and will probably be published in mid-2008. My understanding from other sources is that the text will require sprinklers in buildings higher than 200m and will permit greater fire loads in sprinklered buildings higher than 28m. In effect this should lead to most commercial high-rises being sprinklered.

In 2005 the DDSC began again to collect fire statistics. Most of the data relates to input (number of fire service callouts, spending on fire services) rather than outcomes (burden of fire on society). However, one table gives the total numbers of deaths and injuries. Unfortunately this picture is incomplete because at least 20% of Départements did not provide any data and only bodies pulled from the fire scene are included; deaths later in hospital are not.

Aside from this the DDSC is not planning any revisions to the French fire safety codes; it is clear that it will take political pressure and/or a French disaster to change that position. It is even raising questions about the campaign to have smoke detectors fitted in homes, claiming that this is unworkable because the state cannot check the detectors are installed and working. That is also the case in other countries but has not stopped legislators requiring that detectors be installed in new housing.

I met M Petiteau at a seminar to discuss the introduction of fire safety engineering in France. He was positive about fire engineering and was prepared to accept sprinklers as part of a fire-engineered solution in existing buildings undergoing a change of use.

LCPP

In October I visited the Laboratoire Central de la Préfecture de Police de Paris. This is the organisation that investigates major fires in Paris and in other areas of France if invited. Among other things it also houses the bomb disposal and biological anti-

terrorism investigation teams. My contacts at the LCPP support the greater use of sprinklers to improve fire safety in France. This is useful since following a fire investigation they often give advice to regulators on how to avoid a recurrence.

The LCPP is planning a series of fire tests next year and will include sprinklers in its investigation. I will contact them about this early next year.

CEN TC/127

I attended the CEN TC/127 plenary meeting in Prague. Some in the committee are keen to apply for a mandate from the European Commission for CEN to develop a standard for fire safety engineering but instead the European Commission has said it has no objection to CEN producing a Technical Report, which is not a full standard but a code of practice. A task group, of which I am a member, has prepared a draft. TC/127 is now looking for a practising fire engineer to chair a group which will take this forward.

The European Commission has also told CEN TC/127 it does not object to it writing a Technical Report on hotel fire safety. A draft has been prepared and will be circulated to the members of TC/127 for comment. The draft is based on fire engineering principles, which will leave openings for sprinklers but not prescribe them. I will comment on the draft text.

BS9999

This is a British Standard which will provide standard relaxations in prescriptive, passive fire safety measures if other measures, such as sprinklers, are fitted. For example travel distances can be extended and door and escape stair widths reduced. The standard is due to be released for public comment in January. Architects who follow this standard will often find it is cheaper to design a building with sprinklers than without.

NFSN

I attended a meeting of the National Fire Sprinkler Network in the north of England. Bernadette arranged for Stephen Hughes MEP and Fiona Hall MEP to attend this meeting. Stephen Hughes told us that two amendments had been inserted by the committee into the draft five-year European workplace health & safety strategy; one to require the European Commission to collect adequate fire statistics on the impact of fire, the other to perform an impact assessment on the fitting of sprinklers in all new workplaces in the European Union. He claimed that the European Commission is keen to become involved.

At this meeting I learned that the new sprinkler evaluation tool for schools, developed by a task group of which Bernadette and I are members, has already led to a change in policy in Wiltshire. The official government advice on fire safety in schools, Building Bulletin 100, along with a specification for sprinkler systems in schools, is due to be issued in November.

UK Ministerial Meetings

The two meetings arranged by Bernadette have been postponed to 10th and 17th December. We will meet the UK Ministers for the fire service and for building codes. The first meeting is to discuss Europe and the second the UK.

SPP Pumps

SPP Pumps, a British-based manufacturer of sprinkler pumps active in several European countries, will join the EFSN from January 2008.

Next Steps

- 1) Participate in London Fire Brigade seminar in City Hall.
- 2) Coordinate EFSN Technical Committee meeting in Amsterdam.
- 3) Coordinate EFSN Council meeting in Hamburg.