



EUROPEAN FIRE SPRINKLER NETWORK

January 2008 Report

January was much busier than usual, as the EFSN reached its five-year anniversary. In that time we have seen a huge change in the perception of sprinklers in Europe, so that each revision to a building code now almost always includes new requirements to fit sprinklers. However, the new requirements often do not go far enough and many codes lie unchanged for decades. There is still much to do.

Finland is committed to reducing fire deaths from above to below the European average and sprinklers will be part of the Finnish plan to achieve that. In Brussels the European Parliament now has sprinklers as part of its five-year health and safety in the workplace strategy, which will raise the profile of sprinklers across Europe. The campaign for sprinklers in hotels is also making progress in Brussels.

Sprinklers in European Parliament Health & Safety at Work Strategy Document

On 15 January the European Parliament adopted a resolution on the Community Strategy 2007-2012 on health and safety at work (2007/2146(INI)). In the 13-page document, which covers many areas of health and safety in the workplace, are two items of interest to the fire safety community:

“M whereas there are no statistics available regarding the negative effects of fires on health and safety at work”

53. Calls on the Commission to undertake research into the feasibility and benefits both to health and safety at work and to society as a whole of requiring all new buildings intended to be workplaces to install fire sprinklers where it is safe to do so;”

The document, *“Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission and the governments and parliaments of the Member States.”*

There is still some way to go but this has considerably raised the profile of sprinklers in the political community in Brussels.

In parallel with this effort, European Commissioner Kuneva will hold a meeting on 8th February with major players in Europe’s hotel industry, to discuss what action should be taken to improve hotel fire safety. Some hotel operators will be strongly against any imposition from Brussels. On 5th March the EFSN will meet Kuneva to make its case. Some national governments have a history of favouring producer interests rather than those of consumers when it comes to fire safety. However, during an informal discussion with a bureaucrat who is handling this issue, I learned that Kuneva would like to see some progress. Meanwhile the number of European sprinklered hotels on the EFSN web site is now almost 470.

Finland

Finland has the worst fire death statistics in Western Europe, with an average of 100 deaths each year from a population of 5 million. Three to four times as many men as women die, with alcohol and relative poverty often a contributory factor. This is a national embarrassment and the government has publicly committed to be in the top five in Europe for fire safety by 2015. It has even published annual targets, so that the plan is to reduce fire deaths to 30 by 2012. At a seminar in Helsinki opened by the Finnish Interior Minister, the various senior civil servants and others who gave presentations all admitted that it would be impossible to reach the targets without including sprinklers as part of the solution. I gave a presentation explaining what was happening with domestic and residential sprinklers in North America and the rest of Europe. I expect that this year Finland will introduce requirements to fit sprinklers in certain types of new buildings, most likely in all new social housing but perhaps in all new housing. At the seminar an organisation which builds and operates social housing projects said that it already required sprinklers in its new buildings.

Meeting with Parmjit Dhanda MP, UK Fire Service Minister

In January I again met Parmjit Dhanda MP, the UK Fire Service Minister. This time I was joined by Ken Davey of FM Global and Jim Mowatt of the Unite trade union. We discussed fire safety in the workplace and the need to fit sprinklers. Ken showed how the economics stack up while Jim made the case to protect worker safety. Parmjit did not make any commitments, we believe out of concern at being branded anti-business by the Confederation of British Industry, CBI, which has stated its opposition to sprinklers. It is strange that despite this stance many CBI members systematically put sprinklers in their buildings to manage their risk from fire. We will look to engage with the CBI to discuss this issue and try to find common ground. Meanwhile I have written an article for the next edition of Fire Risk Management magazine, highlighting that sprinklers could almost certainly have prevented the deaths of the four fire-fighters in the Atherstone-on-Stour warehouse fire.

While Parmjit Dhanda is reluctant to introduce changes, Glasgow has announced that it will run a pilot project whereby it will offer a parcel of Council land for residential development, with the condition that sprinklers be fitted. The Welsh Assembly is pushing to obtain jurisdiction over fire safety so that it can impose a requirement to fit sprinklers in all new housing.

European Fire Academy

This is a fire service initiative which brings together senior fire officers from across Europe to discuss issues of common interest. One of their aims is to become influential in Brussels. At their January meeting in Paris I was invited to talk about the potential for sprinklers to save lives. I made some very useful contacts at this event, including the leaders of the national burns victims associations of Belgium, France and The Netherlands. The burns victims associations are well-established and have excellent political contacts. At this event they formed a European association, to be based in Brussels and will look to include similar organisations from other European countries. The leader of the French association was very interested in sprinklers and we agreed to meet in March.

Tunnels

We are seeing increased recognition of fixed fire-fighting systems as a measure to make tunnels safe from fire. In January the UK announced its first tunnel to be fitted with a fire suppression system, joining many other European countries. The Tyne Tunnel announced on behalf of the New Tyne Crossing project, which will upgrade the existing Tyne Tunnel and build a second vehicle tunnel, that water mist systems will be fitted. The press release states, "It is expected that these new safety measures will form a potential 'blue print' for the design of future tunnels in the UK."

Training Seminar with Paris Fire Brigade

In January I was joined by representatives of Viking, FM Global and Lubrizol to give a training seminar on sprinklers to the Paris Fire Brigade. In France the fire safety building codes and the measures required on a project basis are strongly influenced by the fire brigade, so it is important that fire officers are well-informed. We will look to run more such events in the future to try to make fire officers aware of the life safety benefits of sprinklers and the flexibility they afford architects.

Austria

I visited Austria and met four leading sprinkler contractors. One of them, Accuro, said it would join the EFSN. I encouraged them to form a local association and to fund activities to promote sprinklers in Austria.

New Members

During January the British contractor Fighting Fire and the Swiss Association of Public Building Insurance Companies joined the EFSN. A number of other companies and organisations have shown an interest in joining.

High-Rise Building Codes

In January France and Germany sent their draft high-rise building codes to the European Commission to check that they do not infringe European law. The European Commission and national governments of the Member States have until March to comment. It is unlikely that there will be any comments.

The German code requires sprinklers in all new buildings higher than 22m unless they are divided into compartments of 200m², in which case the height threshold is 60m. In the accompanying explanatory document it states that the previous use of a 1m wall to prevent vertical fire spread has been shown in practice and in tests to be inadequate and that a horizontal protrusion is necessary. The effect is that any smooth-fronted glass buildings higher than 22m will need to be sprinklered but that apartment buildings with balconies probably will not need sprinklers unless they are higher than 60m. This is only a model building code and when it is finalised in a few months time each German state may or may not adopt it, as it is or with changes.

The French code requires sprinklers in car parks that are part of a high-rise building. It also allows the fire load to be increased from 480 MJ/m² to 680 MJ/m² if a sprinkler

system is fitted. It is claimed that this will lead many designers to specify sprinkler systems but I am unconvinced. Otherwise the code only requires sprinklers in buildings higher than 200m.

BS9999

The draft of BS 9999 “Code of practice for fire safety in the design, management and use of buildings” went out for public comment in January. Any comments must be submitted by 31st March 2008. Although I am a member of the committee I will still comment since I believe that many of the architectural freedoms permitted if sprinklers are fitted are too timid.

Next Steps

- 1) Attend an NFSN sprinkler seminar in the House of Commons.
- 2) Give a presentation at the Dutch VSI sprinkler association.
- 3) Participate in a meeting with UK water companies.
- 4) Visit the Spanish trade show Sicur in Madrid.