



EUROPEAN FIRE SPRINKLER NETWORK

February 2008 Report

February should have been a month to celebrate the fifth anniversary of the EFSN. Sadly instead it was a month in which we mourned the death of Bernadette Hartley, who for ten years had actively campaigned for sprinklers, first in the UK and more recently in the Brussels institutions and in other countries. We cannot replace her but will continue the campaigns, inspired by her example.

Despite losing half the month to jury service I visited The Netherlands and Spain to meet with those who are promoting sprinklers in those countries. Back in the UK at a seminar in the House of Commons sprinklers received huge support, all of which is a way to put pressure on the Fire Minister for change.

Bernadette Hartley

At 13:30 on Thursday, 14th February, Bernadette Hartley died after a brief fight against lung cancer. Over the past five years she had worked closely with me to promote the use of sprinklers to improve fire safety in Europe. She first learned about sprinklers when she was a researcher for Tess Kingham, who was a parliamentary candidate in Gloucester, southwest England. There was a huge fire in a furniture store and Bernadette learned that there was a simple, well-established tool to prevent it. She was outraged that sprinklers were not mandatory in such buildings and when Tess Kingham was elected in 1997 Bernadette wrote a maiden Parliamentary speech for her about the need for sprinklers. At the time the newspapers, other media and fellow politicians laughed at Tess Kingham for using fire safety and sprinklers as a subject for her first speech in the House of Commons. It is a tribute to the efforts of Bernadette that today fire and sprinklers are regularly debated in the House of Commons, with speaker after speaker supporting sprinklers.

Following the election of Tess Kingham Bernadette founded the National Fire Sprinkler Network with Peter Holland, who today is the Chief of Lancashire Fire & Rescue Service. This organisation inspired the creation of the European Fire Sprinkler Network and she since set up the EU Sprinkler Forum in the European Parliament and the Sprinkler Forum in the Scottish Parliament.

Bernadette was a lifelong member of the British Labour Party and as such had many political friends, both in the UK and in Brussels. She herself stood as a Labour candidate for the European Parliament in 2004 but was not elected and returned to the sprinkler campaign. Bernadette opened many doors for sprinklers; when she went to Sweden she met the Prime Minister! Thanks to her efforts we have secured political support in the European Parliament and in several national parliaments for the increased use of sprinklers. She also secured the support of trade union leaders, and most importantly the active, vocal support of the Fire Service, both in the UK and

other countries. This support has brought real change, with sprinklers now required in supermarkets and schools in the UK. Her efforts have also inspired others to launch local campaigns, so that today when a fire code is revised almost anywhere in Europe it invariably increases the recognition of the benefits of sprinklers. All this is an enormous achievement in the face of an entrenched status quo.

Bernadette is survived by her daughters Amy and Barbara, and her partner Brian.

House of Commons Seminar

I attended a seminar on sprinklers in the House of Commons in London on 4th February. The speakers discussed the environmental damage caused by fire and the potential of sprinklers to reduce it; the view of insurers on sprinklers, the extent to which they reduce property losses and the difficulty that insurers have to get them into existing buildings and the surprising stance of the Confederation of British Industry against sprinklers, despite many members of that organisation routinely fitting them in their properties.

Typically of Bernadette Hartley, who was too ill to attend, she sent a statement which was read out in front of the Fire Minister, Parmjit Dhanda MP, calling on him to set up a round table to discuss fire safety and sprinklers. Bernadette died the next week.

NOVB Event

The Dutch fire trades association, NOVB, organised a seminar in February at which I was invited to speak on 'Fire safety and the developments in Europe'. The event was well-attended and we heard about the latest developments in The Netherlands, where fire safety documents for prisons and healthcare facilities are currently being revised.

Sicur

Every two years the Spanish trade association Tecnifuego-Aespi organises an exhibition in Madrid. I visited and made some useful contacts. I also signed a memorandum of understanding whereby the EFSN will support the campaigns of Tecnifuego-Aespi with information and documentation. As a first step I wrote an article which will be translated into Spanish for the trade association journal.

Meeting with UK Water Companies

In February I joined a meeting with the British water companies to discuss the connection of sprinkler systems to the mains. In the UK it is possible to connect a sprinkler system to the mains. However, in many cases the water companies make it hard to draw the sprinkler system supply upstream of the water metre. The ½" water metre can cause a 0.5bar or greater pressure drop at the flow required for a domestic system (two sprinklers), making direct connection unviable. There were a number of other issues discussed and we look forward to further dialogue to reach consensus.

Jury Duty

Unlike many other European countries the UK still has compulsory jury duty, whereby members of the public are selected at random to judge whether someone accused of a crime is innocent or guilty. I spent two weeks of February on jury duty, during which time I was not able to do much else.

Next Steps

- 1) Give a report at the EFSN AGM in Brussels.
- 2) Participate in the EFSN Technical Committee meeting in Brussels
- 3) Meet European Commissioner Kuneva to discuss hotel fire safety.
- 4) Lead a workshop on sprinklers and the environment at the Local Government Association conference in Coventry, UK.
- 5) Attend the SP fire safety in tunnels conference in Stockholm.
- 6) Participate in the NFSN AGM in Eastbourne, UK.
- 7) Participate in the SFPE Section Française AGM in Paris.
- 8) Submit comments on the draft of BS 9999.