March 2010 Report

Brussels 2010 has had tremendous support, despite the difficult economic conditions, with the conference sold out as of mid-March. We now have a waiting list. The Annual General Meeting will be held the day before the conference at 14:00 in the Brussels Hilton Hotel. All EFSN members are welcome. We continue to gain new members: Allianz, a major insurer, has joined the EFSN through its Paris offices. Hotel fire safety is back on the agenda in Brussels, as part of a more general political campaign by MEPs for safety of services. In March the Belgian Fire Sprinkler Network had a very successful second meeting. It is organising a burn demonstration for the press, politicians, fire services and others.

Brussels 2010

By mid-March the Brussels 2010 conference was sold out. The conference room at The Hilton has a capacity of 220 people. We have registrants from 20 countries with the furthest coming from New Zealand. They include government officials and fire officers from eight countries, including the host country. As in previous conferences, the strongest contingents will be from the host region, the Benelux, with 94 from that region. We now have a waiting list for cancellations. Final preparations are well underway and I look forward to a successful conference.

Annual General Meeting

The AGM will be held to coincide with the Brussels 2010 conference, at 14:00 in the Brussels Hilton Hotel. All EFSN members have been invited. Please let me know if you would like to attend so that I can make sure we have sufficient space.

New Members

I am delighted to report that Allianz, the insurer, joined the EFSN in March through its Paris office. This is the second insurer to join the EFSN from France since René Pons began work in September.

European Hotel Fire Safety

Thanks to Glyn Ford in March I met Malcolm Harbour MEP, the new chairman of the European Parliament Committee for the Internal Market and Consumer Affairs. We discussed efforts to achieve an improved, consistent standard of hotel fire safety across the European Union. We explained that the previous Parliament and Commission had pressed the hotel industry to devise and adopt a self-regulatory scheme. Unfortunately it had rejected that approach. He was interested in using standardisation as a route to achieve better safety, rather than a Directive specifying

every detail. Since our meeting his committee has decided to do a report on the "future of standardisation". The report will include elements on the "safety of services", including hotel fire safety. While we are still far from our goal it is a success for the EFSN to see hotel fire safety back on the political agenda in Brussels.

Belgian Fire Sprinkler Network

In March ANPI, a member of the EFSN, hosted the second meeting of the Belgian Fire Sprinkler Network. There were 14 participants, including one from the government, one from the Belgian Burns Victims' Association and one from the European Burns Casualties' Association, EBCA. We learned that there is a government working group studying how to improve fire safety in housing, although it is currently looking at public information campaigns rather than making buildings inherently safer. The network agreed to focus its efforts on care homes, hospitals and hotels. It will organise a sprinkler burn demonstration at ANPI, with invitations to the press, Ministry of Interior, Fire & Rescue Services and care home owners and managers. Contractors and manufacturers attending the meeting agreed to donate time and material for the demonstration. The next meeting will be held on 4th May at EBCA offices in Neder-over-Heembeek. Please contact me if you would like to attend.

France

Our French network continues to grow with the addition of Allianz in March. With René Pons and other EFSN members I met Colonel Jean-Paul Spiess of the French fire officer training school for a rehearsal of the training seminar scheduled for 21-22 April. I am grateful to those EFSN members for their support and look forward to a successful training seminar next month. A second seminar is planned for November.

Meanwhile René has made appointments to give training to an architect and a fire chief in Avignon in the south of France.

UK

I met the Association of British Insurers, ABI, which we have persuaded to become active in calling for wider use of sprinklers. In December the ABI held an event in the House of Commons to launch a paper on the subject. It is now seeking broader support for its aims from regulatory advisors and industry groups.

In parallel with this activity FM Global has set up the British Sprinkler Alliance to campaign for sprinklers in industrial and commercial buildings. The organisation is to be registered in April. Meanwhile it has assessed the views of MPs on sprinklers, finding them generally positive and reasonably informed.

In March I also attended a meeting organised by the water companies to discuss water supplies for fire-fighting. Initially this was expected to be mainly about hydrants but thanks to responses to the consultation sent in by myself and others there was considerable time given to sprinklers. It was agreed that the subject would be put on the agenda of the committee chaired by the government regulator. This is needed since the sprinkler industry wants plenty of water at high pressure, while the water

industry wants to drop the pressure to reduce leaks and only install small diameter pipes to save money. Only the regulator can break this deadlock.

Fire Safety in Timber Buildings

I attended an international seminar in Berlin organised by the wood industry to promote a code of practice it had drafted on how to make timber buildings safe from fire. Wood is being used by Europe's construction industry because it as a natural material which embodies a lot of carbon that would otherwise be in the atmosphere. However, it is a combustible material and so is seen by many fire safety experts as posing a greater risk to fire safety than bricks or concrete. The wood industry is keen not to have its product handicapped by tougher fire safety requirements than bricks or concrete and so its code of practice claims no additional measures are necessary.

In the seminar we heard that solid wood retains its strength better than steel during a fire, is slow to ignite and offers effective fire compartmentation for lengthy periods. Many of us are unconvinced by these arguments since a high quality of workmanship is necessary to achieve this performance and we have also seen the reports of several recent major fires in the UK. While most of these fires were in buildings under construction not all of them were. Furthermore at least one building was partially completed and that part of the building was about to be occupied. Had that happened just before the fire it could have become a catastrophe rather than an insurance loss. One area of concern is the need for highly effective fire-stopping in voids. Fire-stopping is hard to verify once a building is complete and over the lifetime of a building it is likely to be breached by rewiring and other changes. Many fire safety experts believe that sprinklers should be fitted in timber buildings, in particular if they are more than single-storey. It is interesting that countries such as Canada, Finland, Norway and the United States, which already use a lot of wood in residential construction, are beginning to introduce requirements to fit sprinklers in new housing.

René Pons is to visit a French architect I met at this seminar to teach him something about sprinkler systems. I was encouraged that the architect requested this training.

ISTSS 2010

I gave a keynote presentation at the International Symposium on Tunnel Safety and Security, which was held in Frankfurt in March. The symposium was organised by SP, the Swedish laboratory and EFSN member. It was well-attended. Active fire protection is becoming increasingly accepted across Europe and in North America as a necessary fire safety measure in long or busy tunnels. Today the debate is more often about technical details such as whether the system should be automatic or manually-operated; what fire test protocols are appropriate to evaluate system performance; and whether a generic set of design parameters can be set for water spray systems, as has been done in Australia and Japan. On this last point one theoretical presentation from Ken Harris of Parsons Brinckerhoff used FDS to calculate the required application density to deal with a range of fire scenarios. Magnus Arvidson of SP ran some tests on a storage commodity with water spray and water mist nozzles to see what density they required to achieve control and suppression. While these results are not yet sufficient to be clear about the necessary

parameters, they do suggest that the 10 mm/min used in Australia, which has dealt with real fires, is in theory more than the minimum plus a reasonable safety margin.

Next Steps

1) Participate in a CEN TC/127 meeting in Brussels and support the planned programme of work on fire engineering.
2) Finalise preparations for the Brussels 2010 conference and coordinate the event.
3) Attend the AGM of the French Chapter of the SFPE in Paris.
4) Meet British government officials to discuss the 'Better Regulation' rules which govern regulatory changes.
5) Participate in the drafting of BS 9991, a fire safety code for housing.
6) Attend a meeting of the Business Sprinkler Alliance.